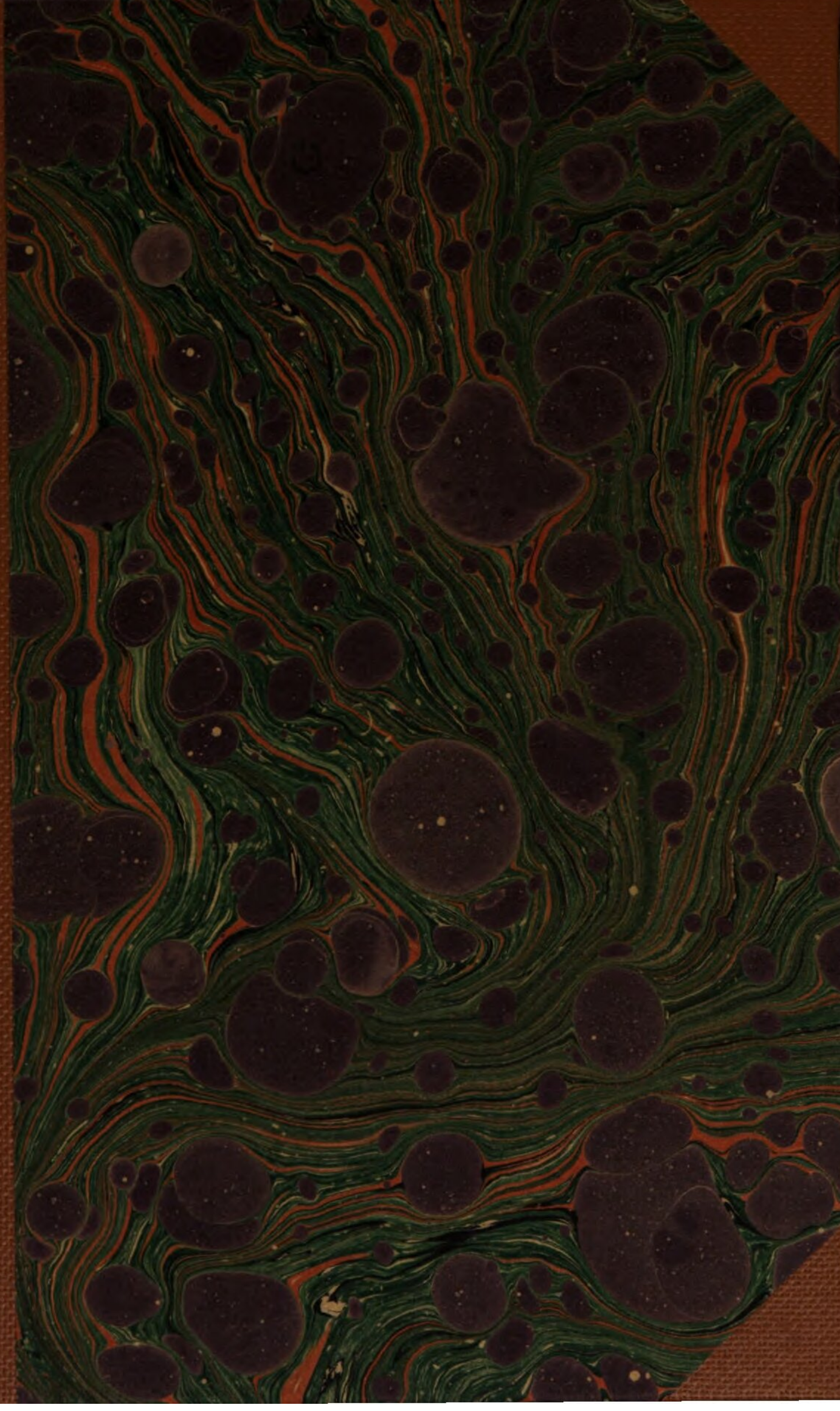


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THE HEIRESS OF HAUGHTON.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

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VOL. II

THE
HEIRESS OF HAUGHTON;

OR,
THE MOTHER'S SECRET.

BY
THE AUTHOR OF "EMILIA WYNDHAM," "AUBREY,"
&c. &c.

(Anne Marsh)

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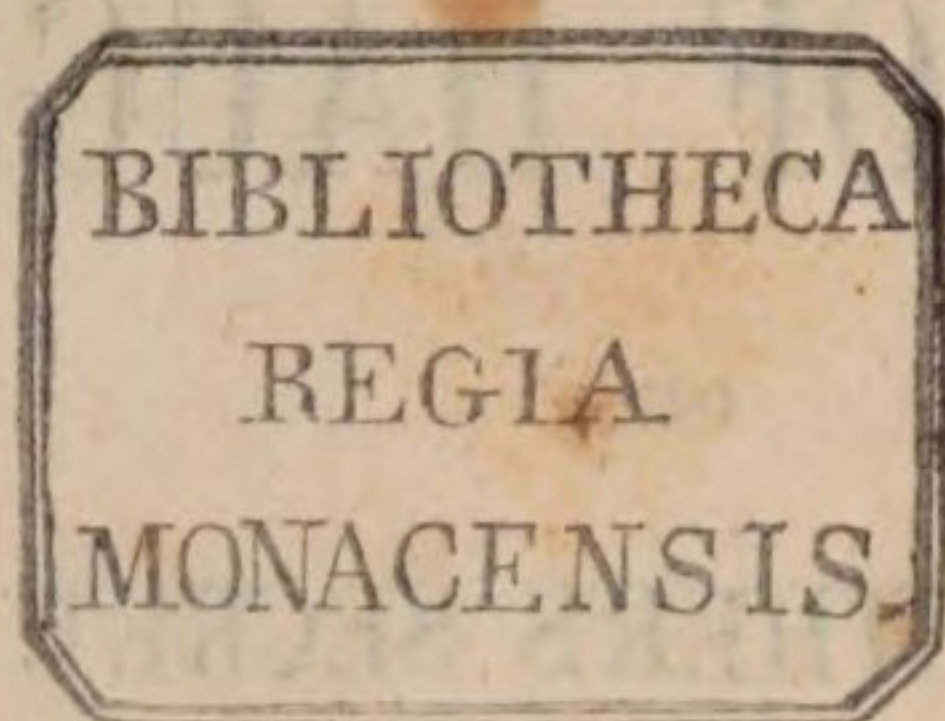
IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

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BERNHARD TAUCHNITZ

1855.



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THE HEIRESS OF HAUGHTON.

VOL. II.

CHAPTER I.

Money, like manure, does no good till it is spread. There is no real use of riches, except in destitution; the rest is all conceit.

BACON.

WHEN Imogene entered the drawing-room, the sun had been sometime set; and, though the windows were still open, admitting the evening air, candles were lighted, and every one engaged in some way or other.

Mr. Glenroy and Mr. Elmsley sat at one of the tables, examining some books of architectural drawings, and Albert, standing behind, was looking over them. Lady Ulick, extended her full length upon a sofa, with the last new novel in her hand, was yawning as if she would dislocate her pretty jaws. — Lord Ulick, upon another, in much the same attitude, was audibly snoring over his newspaper. — Charlotte had challenged me to chess, and we sat at a small table, in all the futile seriousness of that most respectable game. — Lady Faulconer, in a distant corner of the room, was engaged with Eugene and Laura, to whom she was teaching the mysteries of back-gammon; and the lively rattle of the box — and a pleasant little

laugh from Laura, were the only sounds that relieved the sobriety of this most silent meeting.

The door opened, and Imogene appeared. She looked round, hesitated, and seemed half disinclined to come in. It was true, — for, almost the first time in her life, she felt embarrassed, uncertain, — feeling as if she scarcely knew how to look or what to do. She had seldom felt in this manner before. Characters, transparent and truthful as hers, are usually spared the nervousnesses and hesitations which torment those, who are not habitually well-bred, and early trained to good manners, or who think a good deal about themselves. But the plague of self-consciousness beset her at this moment. — How should she meet Eugene? — How should she look at him? — Unkindly? No — but kindly, could she? when he had been so unjust and unkind himself.

It was a great relief to discern his velvet dress, for a part of that, was all she could see of him, at the very further end of the room, Lady Faulconer standing over him and hiding his head and face from general view; with Laura, in high spirits, at the same table, her *carnet* lifted high by her pretty little arm. They were so busy, that not one of the three turned the head as the door opened. Imogene came forward.

“My dear lassie,” began Mr. Glenroy, looking up — “we want you. — You left a sentence unfinished when you flew away to your mother — like a blithe bird, as you are, — but the last word was a pregnant one — Church. — But how’s this?” seizing her by

the arm, and looking her hard in the face. — “You have been crying.”

She coloured and turned her head away — but said nothing.

“Crying, — and what can my bonny bairn have been crying for? — Little Moggie,” — in a tone of great affection — “is not given to crying.”

“Oh! nothing — nothing, — I was only very foolish — nothing, dear Mr. Glenroy, nothing!”

You should have seen the expression of Albert’s eyes, as they fastened upon her.

“Well — well,” — her guardian said kindly — “I understand . . . Nothing means don’t wish to tell you anything. — I beg your pardon, my ain dear lassie, for even asking; — but don’t cry, if you can help it, when old Glenroy’s in the house. — It makes him feel queerly.”

Mr. Elmsley’s eyes were not raised. — He had too much delicacy to look up, but you saw by his countenance that he was much moved. Red eyes with Imogene were quite an event — yet he *had* once or twice seen them before; and had found reason to suspect what cause, and what cause almost alone, it was which made Imogene shed tears.

As for Albert, he looked as if he longed to press forward, catch her to his heart, and kiss every trace of sadness away.

She tried to cheer up; but, to tell truth, her poor little heart was still heavy.

Mr. Glenroy fixed his eyes upon her again. He

was not one who, like Mr. Elmsley, feared even to look up, lest he should add annoyance to sorrow; but he said nothing more in the way of inquiry, but only after a silent contemplation of her face for some time, during which a shade of grave anxiety passed over his own, as if to divert her attention, he turned to the book which lay upon the table, and made room for her to sit down as she most often did, upon the corner of his chair, saying —

“We must proceed to business. — What was it my lassie was thinking of? — I was talking of a music hall, at Armidale. — She seemed to wish for something else, first.”

Armidale and business were sure to divert Imogene's attention from any selfish sorrow. She brightened up in a moment.

“Yes, dear Mr. Glenroy — I *did* wish for something else, first — but it is not I, that thought of it — it was Mr. Elmsley — I am sorry — It seems now *very* ungrateful, not to have thought of that the very, very first.”

“Well — well — you have recollected it now — You want to have a church — I doubt whether the folk at Armidale, will much thank you for one. — They are mostly, I fancy, of the sort which you in England consider as rascally dissenters, and whom we in Scotland look upon as much better Christians than many of yourselves.”

Imogene looked as if she did not quite enter into the full meaning of this speech.

"I only wished . . ." said she, looking up smilingly and lovingly in his face — "It only seemed to me, and I have been thinking of it even before you came this time — that it would seem as if *we* did not care for God." In a low, trembling, awestruck voice, the sacred name was uttered — "If we were so busy, setting up all sorts of other pleasant things, — and did not build a house for Him — as David in the Bible says . . . I am but a child," she added, with humility — "you know best what is right."

"My ain dear lassie — my ain heart's treasure," he said, fondly — "that is right — that is as it should be — that's just as I want you to be. — Think for yourself, as far as the Almighty gives you grace and capacity — for it is your own task, my bonny child, and you cannot too soon learn to execute it. — You are right — 'Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings thou hast perfected praise.' — The neglect had not struck me in this light — I was in the wrong — it shall be amended — and see! already for the love of thee, I was going to set about it — but I like better to do it because thou art in the right, than because I can refuse thee nothing. — Yes, Imogene, to see you in the right — thinking rightly — acting rightly — that is the crowning felicity for old Glenroy."

His voice quivered a little with intense tenderness; but he began to turn over the leaves of the book before him, his arm thrown fondly round her waist, as she sat upon the corner of his chair.

He was about to open one of the plates when he

stopped, turned his head suddenly to where Albert stood, and said —

“Young gentleman, — you seem to have some taste for these matters. Let us have your opinion, too. Take a chair and sit down by me and this good little lassie, here — Shall he, Imogene?”

Imogene coloured, and smiled, and her face was bright and happy, as she moved a little nearer to Mr. Glenroy, as if to make room for Albert.

He drew a chair and sat down by them, without waiting for a second invitation, as you will easily believe.

I was looking up, whilst Charlotte was deeply considering her next move. I caught Lady Faulconer's face — she had turned rather away from the backgammon players, and seemed watching the little scene at the table with attention. But she met my eye, and, instantly changing her position, devoted herself again to the two young combatants.

And now all was quiet in the large drawing-room, except the little shrieks of Laura — low murmurs from Eugene — the rattle of the dice, at one end; and the murmuring conversation kept up over the book of architectural prints in the centre of the room.

I could not help looking at the group, as the intervals of my own game allowed me. Albert and Imogene appeared deeply engaged in what they were about; but the sweet play of their countenances, when they looked up and spoke to each other, was lovely. I observed that Mr. Glenroy very often addressed Albert; and there was an expression of complacency and satis-

faction, at the intelligent answers he received from the dear Celestial. Never had he better deserved the name. Never had I seen him look so handsome, so intelligent, so exactly what one would wish a youth to be, as that evening.

There was the promise of a glorious summer in that first opening day of spring.

Alas! poor Albert.

The next day, this pleasant party was broken up, and we returned to Drystoke.

We travelled in the same manner as when we came. Albert mounted the box, and drove, never once turning to speak to any one during the whole way. He was apparently absorbed in his own thoughts.

Within the carriage, people seemed disinclined to talk. Either out of spirits — or tired — or, perhaps, finding it impossible even for *them*, after the kind and hospitable manner in which they had been received, to indulge in their usual subject of conversation — the faults and follies of their neighbours. That topic abstained from, there seemed no other interesting enough to excite to discourse. I was so glad to be spared what it gave me so much pain to hear, that I was quite content to be dull, and to watch the flying trees and hedges, as we speeded along. I was also very glad, and hoped it was an earnest of future improvement in this way, when a remark of Charlotte's, with which she broke the long silence, met a sharp rebuke from her mother.

“Well, Haughton is a fine place — but there’s a monstrous steep hill to go up. However, one has a good view when one gets there — and they are nice people, don’t you think so, Mr. Lenham? Only Imogene will grow up into a prig, or, what is worse, a Charlotte Corday — Who ever in the world before thought of giving a girl a tutor, instead of a governess? Why, she’ll be quite an oddity, when she grows a little older. For that matter, she’s an oddity, in my opinion, now — poor thing! but how *can* she help it? — And Eugene, what a cross-grained, curious-tempered fellow he is — I declare they are the strangest set . . .”

“I wish, Charlotte,” said her mother, with severity, “that I could ever teach you to restrain the license of that bitter tongue of yours. Nothing is too sacred or too good to escape you. That habit of decrying everything and everybody that you happen to speak of, is one of the most unamiable and repulsive in which a girl can indulge — and you are dreadfully given to it.”

Charlotte gave the usual almost invisible shrug with her shoulders, and turned to me with a look that said —

“Where did I learn that evil habit, think you?”

“As for Imogene Aubrey,” Lady Faulconer went on — “all I can say is, tutor or no tutor, I wish you were like her. She’s a delightful creature — and as for Eugene, he’s one of the most interesting beings I ever saw in my life. So let me hear no more of this stuff.”

And, accordingly, Charlotte pursed up her mouth, and relapsed into silence.

CHAPTER II.

Oh world, thy slippery turns! friends now fast sworn,
Whose double bosoms seem to wear one heart,
. shall within one hour,
On a dissension of a doit, break out
To bitterest enmity.

THE scene now changes, and we return to Eton.

Two or three years have elapsed, and we are all rising fast, through advancing youth, to manhood.

Albert and I can now scarcely be called boys, though we are not yet men — alas! some way from that.

I was ever a staid and quiet personage; but he, rash, hot, impetuous — though most generous, fervid, disinterested, and right-minded — is, as yet, far from being disciplined to self-control and reflection.

The impulse of the moment governs him still; and many false and imperfect views — many mistaken principles, remain to be corrected, by that discipline of life, through which he, more than any fellow I ever knew, was found to profit.

The friendship between him and the Viking, in spite of one or two coolnesses and interruptions, arising from the peculiar temper of young Hardress, is in greater strength than ever. It was increased, by the event I described in the opening of my story. The Viking had saved Albert's life, and his generous heart

seemed to hail this obligation to his friend, with fresh pleasure. It served as an excuse to his own high spirit, for putting up with many an exhibition of Har-dress's haughty and wayward temper; which Albert's heart refused to resent, and which it sorely tried his notions of honour to submit to.

But that he owed his life to the Viking, was a ready excuse for every concession, which, under other circumstances, he might have felt it unworthy of him to make.

I am sorry to say that the Viking, of a far less noble temper, insensibly began to take advantage of this, and now and then to treat his hot-headed and warm-hearted ally, in a manner that it grieved me to see.

Eugene was now at Eton.

Not very long after our last visit to Haughton, Mr. Elmsley had found it necessary to make a serious remonstrance to Lady Emma, as to the manner in which this fine, and very clever, boy was going on. That he possessed genius, and of the first order, he acknowledged; but he believed that dangerous gift, according to the manner in which things were allowed to proceed, only threatened, joined as it was with daily increasing self-will, to complete the inevitable destruction of what was right and good in him.

Encouraged by Lady Emma in every caprice and fancy, — finding in her an ever ready listener to his complaints, he was giving way without restraint, to the waywardness of a character naturally imaginative,

and sensitive to an extreme, till he was likely to prove, not only a self-tormentor in the highest degree, but the plague and tyrant of the whole house.

Proud, tenacious, susceptible, fanciful, — it was often impossible to please or satisfy him.

In vain, Imogene, with angelic goodness and patience, victimized herself in every way, in order to content him — he only grew the more unreasonable, unkind, exacting, and unjust, and treated her at times, with something almost amounting to barbarity. These moods alternated with passionate paroxysms of remorse, self-accusation, and despair, when he had succeeded, in torturing and tormenting his companion, till she broke out into sobs and tears. But this exhibition of better feeling, only added to the evil, by melting her soft and candid temper, reviving her affection, and, upon the whole, keeping alive a species of interest, which might, perhaps, in a more peaceable atmosphere, have subsided into the quiet indifference of daily intercourse — at least, so Lady Emma flattered herself, and so Lady Faulconer, her only confidante in this matter, encouraged her to hope.

But, whatever the effect as to that great object in which Lady Emma's very existence seemed bound up, one thing appeared but too certain to every one else — that Eugene would himself be inevitably ruined, if these evil habits were not corrected.

Mr. Elmsley was a sensible and excellent man, and all the pride he might have taken in the rearing a second Byron, was lost in the desire to do his duty by the

boy, and this duty, he felt, could alone be discharged by urging Lady Emma to consent to send this pampered darling to school.

A public school, it is true, had not saved Byron from much deeply to be deplored; but it would have been worse, far worse, if he had been left as Eugene seemed about to be, and his faculties suffered to grow up in their wildest luxuriance — without a judicious hand with authority enough to restrain them, and wanting those beneficial checks upon temper, eccentricity, and, above all, self-delusion, sensitiveness, and pride, which boys, at a public school, afford to each other.

Lady Emma wept, and resisted, and said he was too young to go.

Mr. Elmsley proposed a preparatory school. But this, Eugene himself would not hear of. He said he would go to Eton — he should like Eton well enough. They'd make a man of him there, — but anywhere else he positively refused to go; and he started up, when something was said by Mr. Elmsley, of the necessity of obedience if the measure were decided upon, and proudly asked — by what right anybody there pretended to coerce *him*? They were not appointed his guardians, that he was aware. He was the son of a great warrior, and a chief, and he would show them he knew how to assert the right to follow his own will.

Mr. Elmsley would have advised some attempt upon Lady Emma's part, to show this singular boy that he was not so perfectly independent as he thought him-

self — for that, without her self-assumed guardianship, he would be utterly friendless, — and if dismissed from Haughton — without family or home. It was true, he had some money; but this, owing to various circumstances not necessary to detail here, had been greatly diminished from the original sum — no very large one — which his father had placed in Mr. Birchell's hands when he committed the child to his care.

At that time, things in Egypt were in so uncertain and confused a state, that a considerable portion of the property Omar Bey had calculated upon, Mr. Birchell had not been able to realize — so that, without Lady Emma's positive assistance, it was doubtful whether the income thence derived would be sufficient for the expenses of Eton; that is to say, at least such expenses as a boy of Eugene's temper and habits is too apt to indulge in.

But Lady Emma would hear of no such thing. — She seemed to shrink with horror from any attempt to curb the high and intractable spirit of the boy, by revelations that could in the slightest degree humble or mortify him.

He was wronged — as she firmly believed, doubly wronged — and all these lofty pretensions of his would be but too fully justified by his claims, when the truth — as it was her full persuasion, sooner or later, it would do — came to light.

So Eugene was, as usual, allowed to have it his own way. Mr. Elmsley, who was deeply anxious upon the subject — for there was something about

Eugene, in spite of his innumerable faults, that it was impossible not to take interest in — consoled himself by thinking that, at his age — for he was still young enough to be a fag — he might find Eton not quite such a favourable place for the indulgence of self-will as he seemed to expect.

So now all was preparation for Eton; and the fuss that was made, and the more than motherly anxieties of Lady Emma — and the way every person and thing in the house, not excepting Imogene herself, were expected to be made subservient to this grand object, would have been enough to spoil a less arrogant and exacting temper than Eugene's.

For him — spoil him, it could hardly be said to do. — He took it all as a matter of course, and seemed to feel not the slightest gratitude to any one, except to Lady Emma, herself. For still, amid a thousand acts that I could name, of petulance, insubordination, and ill-humour, to her — that he loved her at heart could not be doubted. Perhaps, the same might be said with regard to his feelings towards Imogene. — They seemed perverse and unaccountable in a boy of his age — yet there are boys who appear as capable of love, jealousy, and all their train of caprices, and injustices, as much older men.

Eugene's behaviour to Imogene, was that of tyrant and lover mingled. — He was unjust, sulky, morose, ill-tempered; — he was jealous and exacting; — she, gentle, just, and kind — forgiving all things —

enduring all things — hoping all things, till even Eugene was softened by this gentle sweetness — and began to love her in truth, and more than he himself was aware.

“We are going to Drystoke for a few days, Imogene — Albert Faulconer will be at home — I have heard that it is a great advantage when a boy goes to a public school, that he should be taken up by any youth belonging to the higher forms, and especially if he is so popular as, I believe, Albert to be. — He is a friend of yours — I shall speak to him, and ask his good-will myself, and you will do the same, won't you, my dear?”

“To be sure I will, Mamma — and I wish Eugene may make a real friend of Albert — he is such a sensible boy!”

“Yes, he is a fine boy, or rather young man — almost — though not quite so interesting as Eugene — but who is? However, a very promising youth — I do not wonder that Lady Faulconer is so proud of him.”

Imogene did not look up from the frame at which she was as usual embroidering — she was sitting at a little distance from her mother.

“You will do this, Imogene? — Sometimes a word from a companion of their own age has more weight than whole orations from an old woman, like me.”

"Oh, Mamma!"

And she looked up, and laughed — and well she might, at the picture of so much beauty; for that beauty was in many eyes enhanced, rather than impaired, by the anxious, languid expression of the sweet eyes.

"I hope — I hope Eugene will not be *very* uncomfortable at Eton."

"Oh, I can't think why he should — Mr. Lenham and Albert like it so much."

"But, then, Eugene is so different from other boys."

"Why, yes," — said Imogene, consideringly — "he *is* different from other boys — Sometimes one wishes, he were more like — I mean for the sake of his own happiness; at other times, I think it would be a pity he should be much altered — He is so interesting even in his very faults — don't you think so, Mamma?"

"Indeed, I do, my darling — I think him the most gifted and interesting creature I ever met with in my life — of his age I mean," — she added, and sighed.

"And will you be kind to him, and patient with his wilful humours, Albert? — I know he is tiresome — to boys particularly — Sometimes he tries even *my* patience. — He tries everybody's patience but mamma's."

"Does he try your patience?" was Albert's answer.

"Why — to tell the truth — the honest, simple truth but don't ask me — I am so sorry for him — His is a horrid position — I try never to forget it — I try to love him with all my heart — I am so sorry for him."

"Does love come when it is called?"

"Yes, I really think," she said, laughing, "that it does — I don't think I should love Eugene as I do, if love didn't come when it was called."

"Then you own you *have* to call it."

"Well, perhaps I have — but it always comes."

"I would not give a whistle for love like that," — said Albert, scornfully, and half angrily.

"Oh! now you speak and look just like Eugene, — and at such times I feel obliged to call very loud *indeed*, to make the love come," she said, playfully, and a little wickedly.

"Then you have to call very loud sometimes? — I wonder you take so much trouble for any fellow."

"Not — for any but him."

"Him! — and why alone him?"

"Because he is a sort of brother — He is like a son to mamma, and so he is like a brother to me. — I think one can love one's *relations* better by trying — by trying to think of all that is good and beautiful in them — and not of their faults; and I think one ought to do so. — I have tried hard, Albert," she said, for she loved to tell him all that was in her heart — "to look upon and to love Eugene, as if he

were verily and indeed my brother, and to think only of his wonderful talents, and the many good points there are about him — and not of his defects — just as I should do if he were really my brother, — which I sometimes quite forget that he is not.”

“And are you so kind as to do the same by Lenham and me?” he said, colouring high.

She laughed.

“Oh, no! that’s quite a different thing, — Mr. Lenham has no faults, — and, as for you — ”

“And as for me — what?”

“Oh, I don’t know what I was going to say, but it’s quite another thing.”

“Quite another thing about being like brothers,” and he turned away.

“Don’t take it unkindly, Albert — indeed, I did not mean — but you know it is impossible — we are not, — we cannot be like brother and sister, as Eugene and I are.”

“Then, I suppose, you don’t care for me at all.”

“Oh, Albert!”

“And you want me to stand his friend at Eton, Imogene — I can tell you, you are giving me a task that it will not be the easiest thing in the world to accomplish. — Why, Eugene must alter a good deal before he will tolerate Eton, or Eton him.”

“What do you mean?” — she asked, alarmed —
“I was afraid — Oh, I *hope* he won’t be *very* unhappy there.”

“That will be as he takes it.”

"But, Albert, be his friend — for my sake stand his friend — Advise him, help him, tell him what is right — Oh, he does sadly — sadly want a great many things, I'm afraid."

"He is to be at our Dame's, I understand — He'll be fag to the Viking."

"The Viking — who's that?"

"Why, Hardress — You've heard me speak of Hardress."

"Oh, yes, often and often; — but must he be a fag? — Well, if he must, I am glad it is to Mr. Hardress."

"I am not so sure of *that*," thought Albert, aside — aloud, he only said —

"Why so?"

"Because he is your friend — and therefore he is a very nice person."

"Because people love by contraries — eh?"

"Oh, no — no — no," — laughing — "Naughty Albert; — but you shall not get a compliment by fishing for it."

"So you want me to take care of him for your sake — for his *sister's* sake, mind!" — he said with emphasis.

"Exactly so — fancy me his sister, and mamma his mother, for that's just as we feel and no mother or sister could be more anxious about him — So just do, as I am certain you would do, if he were really my brother — which, in every thing but the name, he is."

"Heaven help me!" — he said, with a seriousness that startled her — "As I am faithful to that trust — for *your* sake — as *your* brother! — Imogene, I will watch over him as if he were my own brother."

"That's a dear kind Albert — Thank you — thank you, a thousand times."

"Will you give me a pledge that you trust him to me?"

"A pledge? — I don't understand."

"Well, will you give me something to keep — to remind me of this conversation — though, Heaven knows, I shall never, never forget it."

"I have nothing to give you here."

"Oh yes, you have — that little black ribbon, or velvet, or something that always hangs round your neck — I want that. — I wonder what treasure of memory hangs to it. — Eugene's hair, perhaps," — he added, jestingly.

"Oh no — no — not *his* hair — I don't mind enough for him in reality to put his hair there;" — then, as her countenance was suddenly overcast with a cloud of deep sadness — "It is my poor father's picture, and my poor father's hair."

"Might I look at it — I never saw a picture of him."

"There it not one at Haughton. He never was painted but once — and that was for somebody — a very particular person — that I can remember when I was a child. — She used to be very kind, and petted me, more than was good for me. That was

when mamma's back was turned, which was very bad for a child — but she died, the night poor papa died — and in her drawers, when the servants looked over her things, this picture was found, with a paper upon it, saying it was to be given to me. Nurse showed it me, and put it into a drawer, and locked it up, — but I could never rest, little thing as I was, but I must have it to wear. — So, Nurse tied it round my neck with a black ribbon — and hid it in the bosom of my frock. One day, mamma observed the black ribbon, and she asked me what I wore that for, and I told her I had a picture of papa hanging to it — and she asked me how I came by it; and when I told her Alice Craven had left it for me; — she went pale as death, and then crimson red — and in a hurried, anxious way, asked to see it, and rang the bell for Nurse.

“I showed her the picture — poor Mamma! but she gave it me back again, and told me always to wear it — and then she sent for Nurse, and questioned her a long time about the things, and the paper and what other effects of Alice's were left — but there was nothing to be found, I believe, except a few old gowns. — In large houses, like Haughton, there are such loads of servants — and they seemed to have made very free with poor Mrs. Craven's matters; but I believe there was not a relation in the world to claim them.”

“May I see the miniature — I want to know the

face of him that was *your* father, Imogene — I wonder whether you are like him."

"They say I am — Poor — poor Papa!"

She drew the miniature from her bosom; — he took it and gazed on it intently.

"Yes — you are like him, Imogene. — It is from him you got those eyes — and a look . . . He was a very sensible man, I believe — and you have inherited all his sense, Imogene!"

"Have I? — Oh, Albert, you are turned flatterer. — No, what I have, if I have any, I owe to Mr. Glenroy. — He has been a friend, indeed."

Whilst she spoke, he was untying the black velvet ribbon to which the portrait hung.

"This is for me — and that is for you," — giving her his hand — "my pledge and promise that I will look upon Eugene as if he were my own brother; and back him — yes, even if it were against Hardress himself."

CHAPTER III.

He, conscious of superior merit,
Contemns their base reviling spirit,
His state and dignity assumes;
And to the sun displays his plumes;
Mark, with what insolence and pride
The creature takes his haughty stride.

GAY.

THE holidays are at an end, and we are all at Eton, again. The same party at Mrs. Hollingworth's house that was slightly sketched in my opening chapter.

Hardress, Faulconer, Stanley, and the rest; Lenham, the Minister — Hardress, the Viking — Faulconer, still the Celestial Archer — for, though not a common habit of the school, these nick-names were popular amongst us at Mrs. Hollingworth's. Hers was a large house, and, at the time of which I write, in high reputation; so that many of the first boys in the school were there — Such as are usually sent to the tutors' houses.

Eugene was come up, and had taken his place; and, as Albert had anticipated, he was fag to the Viking.

Already had Albert endeavoured to smoothe the way, by exciting an interest for him in Hardress's mind, speaking of his abilities, and of his descent, and endeavouring to bespeak his patience for Eugene's

many faults and peculiarities; but Hardress made a slighting sort of answer —

“All very well in you, Celestial, as his mother — or, she who stands for his mother — is a friend and connexion of your mother’s — but if he has any of the jackanapes about him, it’s no use talking — I’ll have it out of him. What are chickens sent here for, but to be taught to run.”

“Yes — but, Hardress — It’s not that he’s a jackanapes, but he’s the son of a Circassian woman, and he’s not like us exactly, in many things. He’s as proud as if he were the Sultan of Egypt himself.”

“Proud! Well, we’ll get it out of him.”

“But do it gently — do it gently, Hardress — You’ll drive the fellow mad, else.”

“Never you fear — I’ll bring him to his senses again, if I do.”

“But, Hardress, just listen to me —”

“I don’t know what’s come to you, Archer — you’re grown sentimental, of late. Pooh! pooh, man! Sentiment does not become you at all — Lack-a-daisy! what a face you pull — Why, it’s like my young lady’s governess, with rueful countenance, lamenting herself over the cruelties of fagging. Why, we were all fagged, were we not? — and all the better for it — and do you think this fine eastern young gentleman of yours won’t be the better for having his slave-mother fagged out of him, leaving what he had from his English father behind — for so I understand it — room to grow — Heigh, Celestial?”

“Yes, Hardress — You are right in the main, but there is a way — and I promised his mother and sister I would do my best for him, and I will. He’s not a bad fellow on the whole, but he has a great many faults; but then, Lady Emma has spoilt him; and, in short, Hardress, if you’ll have a little patience with him, and take him by the right handle — why, I’ll be very much obliged to you — that’s all.”

“And if you’ll talk like a sensible fellow, and not stuff me with Circassian romances, I shall be very much obliged to you, Celestial — that’s all.”

Eugene did not seem the least daunted by his first appearance at school. He held himself so high, and every one else so cheap, that to consider himself anything less than equal to the very best among them all, never entered his head. This sort of presumption in a boy of his inches and standing in the school, was, of course, found insufferable; and there was a general inclination to thwart and humble him. As for fagging, he had been initiated into the laws of that institution by Laura — and so tenderly entreated by Imogene to submit with a good grace to what must be — that he took his place cheerfully as fag to Hardress, who, being a tall, fine, manly boy, imposed somewhat upon him. He seemed as if he was inclined to look favourably upon his master.

This lasted for a short time, during which, to my

surprise and that of Albert — who had heard so many conflicting accounts of his indolence and indifference to study at Haughton — the boy applied so indefatigably to his lessons that he soon took a high place among his fellows, and promised, in the course of six months, by mere dint of his abilities alone, to get beyond the fagging.

He had not only despatched the business he had to do, with a quickness that was astonishing, — but was ready to assist his master in copying out, and sometimes finishing his exercises, in looking out words and phrases, and employments of that nature — to these he never objected, but performed such duties with a cheerfulness and alacrity that pleased both Albert and myself.

To Hardress, his conduct was just that which a master likes in a fag. But Eugene took his revenge, if it may be called so, upon others. He was intractable — disobliging — sullen — reserved — to most of the other boys in the house; and appeared to have an opinion of himself, and a contempt for them, that not even his wonderful success and display of almost transcendent ability could render tolerable.

There was one great, tall, powerful boy — the son of a man who had made an immense commercial fortune — who took a peculiar dislike to him. The antipathy, indeed, seemed mutual. Eugene looked down upon the child of commerce with sovereign contempt; and, because he was large and powerful, and bull-necked, and withal not very brilliant in his con-

versation, or remarkable for his talents, had christened him "the coal-heaver," — which, rumour said, his grandfather had actually been. This soubriquet, when it reached Radcliffe's ears, galled him to the quick; though it delighted the rest of the set — for all men hold mere brute strength in mingled contempt and aversion.

The feud with Radcliffe contributed to prolong the period of Eugene's favour with his master. Hardress was delighted with the boy's spirit, and when Radcliffe threatened to thrash him for his impudence, told him to touch his fag, if he dare.

There was a moral force about Hardress which everybody felt; and for some time Radcliffe forbore; but, when no longer called upon to protect him, Hardress became more impatient of Eugene's faults; and when, at last, he began "to practise them upon himself," the temper and insolence which he had rather, when directed to others, encouraged, than repressed, were met with a high hand.

"Why are not my muffins toasted, this morning, Sir?" cried Hardress, angrily, when coming out in his dressing-gown, one morning, he prepared to sit down to breakfast, expecting to find all in order and comfortable, under the exertions of his well-trained fags. — "Why are not my muffins toasted, as usual?"

"Because there's nobody to toast 'em, I s'pose," answered Eugene, boldly. — "Felton is cleaning your shoes — and Hutton is brushing your coat — and Littleton's sick — you know that."

"Yes, I know that — and I know who I ordered to take his work upon him — do *you* know that, Sir?"

"Yes," said Eugene.

"Yes — why wasn't it done, then?"

"Because I don't choose to do it."

"You don't choose to do it! — and what are you, pray?"

"My father's son — and I didn't come here to toast muffins."

"Didn't you? — we'll see that. — Take the toasting-fork and do it this instant, Sir — or I'll know the reason why."

Eugene stood like the statue of defiance.

"Well, Sir!" shouted Hardress.

No answer — no a motion of limb, lip, or eye — not a change of colour, except a little paler — but it was with resolution, not fear.

"Can't you speak? — Won't you do as I bid you?"

"I won't toast your muffins."

"Then I'll thrash you. — Say that again, and I'll thrash you."

"I won't toast your muffins."

"Take that toasting-fork and do it at once!" cried Hardress, striving to master his rising passion — "or I'll thrash you till you can't stand."

"You may kill me, if you like — I don't care — I'll be negro slave to no tyrant."

"Tyrant! — Say that again."

"Tyrant."

"You won't do as I bid you?"

"No, cut me in pieces — yes, do. You're a big fellow, almost a man — Cut me in pieces — it will be noble and brave — A fellow like me, about as thick as your arm — yes, do it — do it — do it — and get your muffins toasted, if you can."

Hardress was pale with rage.

"I'll tell you what I'll make you do, then — if you don't like playing cook, will you be better pleased to be my shoe-black — You go and clean my shoes, and send that other fellow to do your work up here."

Eugene stood stock still. There was a strange expression in his eye.

"You won't!" shouted Hardress — "you defy me! — you won't!" and he seized hold of him by the shoulder and shook him till he was dizzy.

"Take that."

But the door opened, and Albert appeared.

"Heigh day! — What's the matter? — What's the matter, Hardress?"

"The young rascal," cried Hardress, almost inarticulate with passion — "He dares to defy me."

What's this, Eugene?" going up to him, "Defy your master — that will never do here, my boy."

"He wants to make a menial and a slave of me."

"The young gentleman's grander than any of the rest of us," cried Hardress — "We all fagged, and did as we were bid, and a great deal of good it did us — and I'll teach him Eton law — won't I? — or I'll"

"Kill me — yes, do — you easily can — do, do."

"Hold your tongue, Eugene — You forget who you are speaking to."

"And who *am* I speaking to? — What's he? — Who's he? that I should do slavish offices for him!"

"It's the custom of the place, Eugene — You ought not to have come here, if you didn't mean to conform to the customs of the place; wrong or right, it's what we all have done in our turn; Hardress and I, among the rest, and I don't see as how we're the worse for it, not I," said Albert, goodhumouredly.

But Eugene cast upon him a look of scorn.

"*You* might, but *I* won't — there's a difference."

"A difference! you young jackanapes," cried Hardress, losing all patience, and again seizing him roughly — "What do you mean by that? — What do you mean by that?" he shouted, and raised his powerful arm.

"Don't, Hardress," said the Archer, laying hold of the uplifted arm and arresting its descent — "Remember, he is still a child."

"A child!" repeated Eugene, sulkily — "Not such a *child* — No, Mr. Viking, I am no child. Beat me to pieces — Thrash me to atoms — I mayn't be as big, but I am as much a man as you, and a thousand times more! for I'd scorn to tyrannize over the weak, as you do."

"Tyrannize — Mr. Viking! — Nicknaming me! — Who gave *you* leave to call me Viking?"

"The other boys do it, why shouldn't I?"

"Because you are a powder monkey, and a jackanapes — Let go, Albert — let go — I'll annihilate him."

But Albert kept his hold.

"Let go," cried Hardress, turning almost black with passion, and endeavouring violently to tear the hand of Albert from the arm it grasped — "Are you in a league to insult me? let me go — or," — with a tremendous oath, — "I'll hate you to my dying day."

"Let him go, Mr. Faulconer," said Eugene — "It's no use trying to hold in a mad bull."

Hardress stamped, and absolutely foamed with rage.

"Be quiet, you imp of mischief," cried Albert, — "Don't you see you have driven him mad?"

Eugene uttered a wild, almost savage cry of triumph. What must have happened next, it is vain to conjecture; if at this moment the door had not opened, and who should appear but Radcliffe.

He stood still for a second, regarding the scene. — Albert hanging upon Hardress, evidently keeping him back against his will, and Eugene pale, resolute, and defiant, standing before them.

"Hey day! I beg pardon — Didn't think to find Pylades and Orestes in such a pickle — Oh ho! — I spy! There's rebellion in the state! Fagdom is in danger! — How's this? High treason against the Eton Institutes — eh?"

The voice of Radcliffe acted on Hardress like a charm, and he became suddenly cool. He gently shook his arm from Albert, who, indeed, instantly let it go, and saying — "Albert, take the fellow away, I'll reckon with him another time," turned to Radcliffe, and quietly asked —

"And what does Mr. Radcliffe want with me?"

"Vastly awkward," said Radcliffe, affecting a grotesque air of embarrassment — "to interrupt a domestic scene of such pure felicity — Makes one feel deuced awkward, in faith. — What I wanted, was to speak to you about the match between the two houses — but any other time will do. We can wait till you have reduced the refractory young gentleman to order by the gentle measures Faulconer seems so well to approve."

Hardress again turned pale.

"Listening" — he muttered.

But Radcliffe, though the colour flew to his face, affected not to hear him.

"And so, good morning to you — and, as the man says in the play — 'At your good leisure I will wait on you.'"

"Don't go away in that manner, Radcliffe," said Hardress.

"Albert, take the child away ... If you've anything to say, say it — if you've anything to propose, propose it."

"I've to propose first and foremost, that you should do execution upon the refractory, and avenge the insulted laws of fagdom, by giving that young jackanapes a good licking — that is to say, if your better half" — looking with a sneer at Albert — "will allow you."

"Albert," said Hardress, pushing him towards the door, as his eye began to flash fire — "get out of this — It's no concern of yours."

"But it *is* a concern of mine — Radcliffe insults me in you."

"Ha! ha! — Second him! — Side with him! — It's all right!" and Radcliffe laughed contemptuously — "but I see I'm one too many, just now — so wishing this happy party a very good morning, and that we may hear that two big fellows have succeeded at last in reducing one little one — here I go."

And away went Radcliffe.

"You see," said Albert, turning to Eugene — "you see what your behaviour brings upon your master — I tell you again, you have no business here if you won't conform to the customs of the school."

"And *I* tell you," cried Hardress, for his rage was increased by what he thought the absurd patience of Albert, which he felt inclined to resent as a species of treachery against himself — "and," (with another terrific oath) — "I swear it — that you shall black my shoes every morning for a week, or I'll thrash you to within an inch of your life, as sure as the clock strikes nine."

"Hardress! — Hardress!"

"Faulconer! — Faulconer! — Don't mock me with that remonstrating face — I know well enough how it is — New fancies! — new favourites! — Very well — You think I care for it — I don't care — no — not the value of a straw for your affection!"

But his voice was as of one choking, when he said so.

"Don't you — Oh, Hardress! — You can't say that again! — You know how false it is."

"I know that *you* are as false as a woman — as capricious as a woman — and the slave of a woman; and, as such, I whistle you down the wind — aye, as easily as I would this feather" — blowing a small feather that was sailing in the air before him.

"You see, Eugene, what you bring upon me," said Albert, turning away, deeply hurt.

"No — no — it's not him — he's a mere atom in the account. I've seen it long — I've known it long — You are as changeable as a weathercock — as weak as a girl — as false as a ..."

"Hardress! Hardress!"

"Go along — I shall say more than I wish to do, before long ears, there. Get out, both of you, and let me have my room to myself. And you, Sir, do you hear? — Down stairs, like a base scullion knave, as you are — black your master's boots when he orders you, and learn to behave yourself."

Albert stood irresolute, looking wistfully at his friend — a look to have subdued the lion in his fury — but Hardress saw it not. He would not see it — he would not look at Albert.

"I have said," he repeated; and, turning sullenly away, went into a small adjoining room, where his bed stood, and shut the door after him.

Albert remained silent. Stung he was to the quick; wounded to the heart; astonished at an attack so unexpected, and at violence to him so new. He had seen Hardress rude, rough, and unjust to others; per-

haps, the exception in favour of himself was one reason of his great love for the Viking.

He turned at last to Eugene.

"I told you from the first, how it would be, if you would not bring down your stupid pride, and submit to what everybody else submits to in their turn. What mighty harm would it have done you, if you had toasted a muffin? Alfred the Great toasted cakes. Such nonsense! Making a fuss about *such* things! — and much you've got by it! You have to black shoes and boots, instead, you see."

"He! — He can't make me."

"I'm afraid you'll find he can."

The coolness between Hardress and Albert continued. It was plain that each suffered greatly under this alienation — but Faulconer evidently much the most of the two. His feelings were intense. Hardress was of a harder and more stubborn nature, and the way he carried himself was enough to break a heart like Albert's.

Such invincible coldness, united to such invincible composure! He neither seemed ruffled nor concerned, at that which was wringing Albert's heart. But this calm could not last long. Hardress persisted in his determination to break Eugene's spirit; and had recourse to measures of so much severity, not to say cruelty, that Albert again interfered.

He spoke passionately, and almost insultingly, for he was stung nearly to madness, by the cool indifference of Hardress's manner. But his representations had a good effect, at least in one way. Hardress was already beginning to be worn out by the heroic resolution, for really it deserves that name, with which Eugene maintained his determination to preserve himself from what he thought degrading. It was the struggle of pride against pride — but the pride of resistance has something in it which commands our sympathies, whilst the pride of oppression excites universal disgust. The sympathies of Hardress himself, even — for, though violent, jealous, and sullen-tempered, he was not ungenerous in the main — were excited by the astonishing fortitude of his victim.

He was not sorry for an excuse to give in.

"Very well," he said — "I see how it is — I see where it all lies. I've done — I've done," he cried, raising his voice. "And for this once, and for the last time in my life, I give way for your sake, Albert — *For your sake*. It is the parting sacrifice to a friendship that I thought would last for life — but which I now discard from my heart for ever. I see what you're worth — I have learned to value the man, who, on the first occasion that presents itself of playing the fine fellow at his expense, forsakes an old friend, without a feeling of remorse — without one poor regret of nature! — and all for the sake of a foolish girl, and a proud, conceited puppy of a boy!"

"No, no," — as Albert endeavoured to speak.

"It's no use explaining, and explaining. He insulted me, and you backed him."

"Oh, Hardress! Backed him!"

"You did! you did! And the whelp has triumphed. Yes, it's no use denying it — he *has* triumphed, and it's all because he knew you'd back him. So, I am the laughing-stock of the house! Can't reduce my own fag, a baby like that, to obedience! Well, well — it's the letting out of water. Radcliffe will insult me next, and you'll back him, I suppose — but that one must excuse in you — he has a heavy fist, has Radcliffe."

But at this last insult, Albert's eye flashed fire — his face became crimson.

"You *dare* say that to me? You have the *heart* to say that, to me," — his voice trembling, as he pronounced the last of the two sentences.

"Heart! who talks of hearts?" cried Hardress. "I don't pretend to understand such fine things. I know when I think myself ill-used — and I know what I ought to expect for the future, I believe. *Dare* not say it! I *dare*, and repeat it — Radcliffe has a heavy fist — and some of us are quite aware of the fact."

"Say that again, when you see me deserve it — Farewell, Hardress."

His face was working with emotion — which he strove in vain to suppress; he looked wistfully back, as he was about to leave the room — but Hardress would not give in — no, not by offering the slightest sign of conciliation — and so they parted.

The persecution of Eugene from that time, however, ceased — but Hardress treated him no longer as his fag. He sent him to Coventry; never spoke to, or took the least notice of him. His powerful protection being withdrawn, Eugene was in danger of becoming the butt and tease-mark of the rest of the house party, for his pride, and haughty reserve, had, in spite of his acknowledged talents, rendered him excessively unpopular.

Radcliffe, more especially, seemed to take a peculiar pleasure in tormenting him, by every invention in his power; intermingling his sarcasms with indirect insinuations against his master, for his weakness and want of pluck, in having suffered himself to be conquered by such a baby. He also amused himself with uttering all sorts of innuendos against Albert, whose interference he chose to attribute to certain mean considerations of self-interest; for he had learned the family connexion between the Faulconers and the Aubreys, and he knew pretty well the relative value of the two estates.

This went on with impunity for some little time, for Albert was too much absorbed by his own feelings — too deeply hurt at Hardress, to care for anything else. He, indeed, came very little among us; and, having lost his friend, with him seemed to have lost the taste for any other society. He used to be fond of me — though of course I came second in everything to Hardress — but now, he seemed quite to dislike communication. It only embittered his feelings to

appear to sympathize with them, far more to attempt anything in the way of consolation — as for compensation, it was utterly out of the question. He was deeply, deeply hurt. He felt himself ill-used — treated with the most monstrous injustice, by the friend he had loved with such entire affection; and his resentment was serious, as his attachment had been. He never mentioned the name of Hardress, nor once alluded to their quarrel — and I believe, that had I offered myself in the vain character of mediator between them, I should have had still more difficulty in bringing Albert round, than in making Hardress reasonable. It was one of those cases where the person to blame had exhausted his passion, by giving way to all its injustice and violence — but where the person injured had found no such relief.

The sense of injustice rankled in Faulconer's bosom. Characters that feel intensely as he did, are acutely sensible to injustice; most especially from those they love; and they, perhaps, find it more difficult to forgive in such cases, than upon any other occasion for resentment which can arise in life.

So matters stood for a few days.

CHAPTER IV.

Wondrous it is to see in diverse mindes,
How diversely Love doth his pageants play,
And shews His power in variable kindes;

* * * *

But in brave sprite it kindles goodly fire,
That to all high desert and honour doth aspire.

SPENCER.

TIME appeared only to widen the breach between the two friends.

In fact, time, if it does not soften and lead to reconciliation, inevitably gives depth and consistency to what might have passed away in the passion of the hour; as it certainly would have done in this case, had there been, as there ought to have been, relenting and candour on the part of Hardress. A little cool reflection ought to have shown him the unjust violence of his conduct; and made him understand, and allow for, the motives which had actuated Albert.

But jealousy, and a proud implacable temper, prevented any thing of the kind; added to which, the deep wound his high spirit had received, in thus having been conquered by a mere boy, was exasperated by the constant presence of Eugene's cool, indifferent face, whilst the sarcastic insinuations of Radcliffe, and what he understood as covert sneers, upon the part of his other companions in the house, kept him in a constant state of bitterness, the most intense.

Hardress was admired and feared, but had never been loved; and, though a certain awe and respect kept the others from openly affronting him, in any manner which might entitle him to notice and resent it (a thing he would have been very glad to find the opportunity of doing), yet, it was sufficient to keep him perpetually in hot water.

This continual irritation of his haughty temper, only made Hardress the more unjust to Albert, whom he considered the principal cause of these unpleasant circumstances. He was also, I believe, secretly offended that Albert offered nothing in the form of apology or concession. He ought to have felt, and he, perhaps, did feel, that the apology should have come from himself; and that Albert had done nothing, which in any way demanded it on his side; but he had been so accustomed from his superior age and standing in the school — setting aside his naturally arbitrary temper — to assume a certain superiority, that an autocrat would have as soon thought of making excuses to a serf, as he to any one.

Albert was bold, generous, high-spirited, deeply sensitive to unkindness, and doubly so to injustice. That he felt himself in the right, in this instance, only increased his resentment, a fact in contradiction, by the way, of that most false and shallow maxim, "that we are only angry when we are in the wrong."

The two, now, never exchanged a syllable. They shunned every occasion for meeting, and appeared totally estranged.

For my own part, I did not wonder at this termination of the friendship. I had never understood the partiality Albert showed for Hardress; a young man greatly his inferior in all that constitutes the real worth of a character; — but he was dazzled, I believe, by the loftiness of the Viking — who certainly did, by his daring carriage, his high bearing, and proud self-assertion, manage to impose a good deal upon most of us. Hardress softened alone to Albert, and this distinction Albert felt warmly, — besides he had saved his life — risked his own to save him even in the moment of defeat! — And that Albert never forgot.

But I linger to tediousness, unwilling to approach the catastrophe.

One day, Albert chanced to be present (unperceived, it was, I believe), when Radcliffe began to indulge in some insolent, sarcastic remarks upon Hardress, whom he alike envied and hated. Envied for the high place he held among us — a place which Radcliffe, from his superior size, strength, and age, and above all, his unrivalled pre-eminence in the art of boxing, considered as rightly belonging to him. Moreover, he hated him, because of the kind of lofty contempt, with which Hardress chose to treat his superiority in mere brute force, as he disdainfully termed it.

It was a fine evening in the beginning of June. We were assembled in the common sitting-room; Albert, seated on the window-sill, with his feet hanging

into the garden outside, was engaged in reading. The heavy crimson moreen curtain had fallen from the pin that fastened it up, and so covered that portion of the window — and, therefore, as I said, I don't imagine that Radcliffe was aware that it was in the presence of his quondam friend and ally that he began this most outrageous and insolent attack upon Hardress.

Sneers — sarcasms — anecdotes — followed each other in rapid succession; as heated with the theme, and excited by the ill-natured laughter of many who were present, Radcliffe, for some time, went on — ending thus: —

“And, to crown all, in spite of his bullying airs, I believe he's as arrant a coward as exists. He'll thrash that boy, Eugene, to within an inch of his life — but no one will ever see him venture to attack me — and who dares say me nay, when I say so?”

The crimson curtain was torn back with violence, and Albert sprang into the room, — his eyes flashing, his face crimson.

“*I* dare, and *I* will — and I defy you — and call you liar to your face — Liar you are, and you know you are. Hardress is as brave and as generous as a lion — you all of you know it,” looking round with the most withering contempt, — “and yet you are all ready to laugh, and applaud that insolent bully, who envies and hates him, because he knows, as you all know, Hardress is worth a thousand Radcliffes — and the rest of you tied together.”

The words burst from him in such a torrent of

passion, that Radcliffe did not even attempt to interrupt him — though becoming perfectly livid with rage.

“Liar!” — he muttered between his teeth.

“Yes! Liar!” — shouted Albert — “Liar! — and you know it — and it is you that are afraid of *him*, not he of *you*. You have told lies of him behind his back — you dare as soon fling yourself into the eternal fire, as say what you have said, before his face.”

“Dare! — We shall see that. Do you think I dare challenge you?”

“I don’t know how that may be — I said you dare not fight *him*! — as for me, I dare to challenge *you* — and I do it now — but, for Hardress, what I have said, that I stand by, and will to within an inch of my life — you *dare* not fight him.”

Radcliffe expressively doubled his formidable fist.

“We’ll try you first,” said he.

But Stanley and one or two others, who had joined readily enough in the attack upon Hardress, now came forward. No one loved Hardress — every one loved Albert.

“No — no — no. It’s not fair. It can’t be — the odds are against you — No — no — you’ve no chance with Radcliffe — besides, it’s no use. Listen to reason, Radcliffe. It’s Hardress, he said you dare not fight — I say you dare, and that you’ll most likely thrash him; but as to Albert — who thought you dare not have a turn with Albert. Why, man, you’d eat him up, bones and all, in three seconds

No — no — Albert, be quiet — it's no use challenging *him* — You can't fight with a sling and a stone, like little David — and he'd annihilate you with one blow. Let Hardress fight his own battles."

"He has insulted my friend behind his back — and he shall answer it to *me*. I'm not going to hinder Hardress from fighting his own battles, which he's ready enough and able enough to do — and *will*, when that dastardly liar and slanderer dares to repeat that before his face, which he's just said behind his back — but what *has* been said, was said before me — his friend, that once was, whatever we may be now. I hold myself insulted in him, and in myself, and I challenge the bully, and will fight him. He may kill me, if he can."

Stanley was a good-hearted fellow; he shuddered at the danger to which Albert was exposing himself. — It was no imaginary one. — A regular fight upon a challenge was a rare, but a very serious, matter. It would, he knew, thus formally engaged in, be carried on according to the rules of the ring. Radcliffe, he was certain, would pursue the advantage his superior strength and science would afford him, with the most unrelenting disregard of consequences; and a limb, or an eye — or life itself — might be sacrificed to his blind fury, when engaged in a regular battle.

He attempted to interfere in vain, for Albert put an end to remonstrance, by leaping out of the window, and engaging in a game of hockey just as if nothing were the matter.

Radcliffe was sullen and obstinate, and refused every plan to bring the matter to some compromise.

"Why, you'll kill him," said Stanley — "and then what will they do to you?"

"Expel me — and, perhaps, hang me — I don't care, I'll have my revenge out of that rascal."

"But, Radcliffe, consider. — It's a poor revenge — It's no revenge — It will disgrace you to fight one so greatly your inferior — no honour to be got in that way — If it had been Hardress, now, *that* would have been something like — you are more of a match — I believe you'd thrash him — but it would cost you a tug — and we'd all be glad and rejoice when you'd given that insolent fellow a fall. But, Albert! — He's such a fine fellow. — Why, *this* is all for his friend, you see — you'd not have a man sit by to hear his friend abused! — It's a bad cause; you have not got the rights of it — we'll none of us back it — but challenge Hardress, and we're all with you."

"When I have disposed of his friend, the fine Phœbus — him with the glistening hair," — said Radcliffe, with more attempt at poetry than was usual with him — "we'll see what's to be done with the other."

Stanley perceived that all remonstrance was useless. — He knew it would be equally vain to attempt it with Albert. Radcliffe left the room, and the rest dispersed. Stanley stood looking out of the window, his mind full of anxious and perplexing thoughts. There, before him, were the hockey players — Albert, the

most agile and gay of the group; — but alas! — how lithe! how light! how slender! — what a contrast to the powerful Radcliffe?

Suddenly a thought struck him.

He put on his hat and went to the playing fields, where he was told Hardress was. He found him sitting under some lofty trees in a remote part of the ground, teaching tricks to a French poodle he had lately bought.

“There — Sir — now — Sir — again, Sir — very well, Sir! — capital! capital!” — and he patted the little artist upon the head, who looked up, wagging his tail, seeming as much delighted with praise, as any child could have been.

“You’re teaching your dog,” — began Stanley.

Hardress looked up.

“I suppose I may teach my dog, without it mattering to you,” — was his rough answer.

“Certainly — and I beg your pardon if I interrupted such agreeable company.”

“Dogs are better company than men, according to my view of things,” — said Hardress; and he returned to his occupation. — “Again! — leap! — one, two — now beg my pardon, for you’ve done it wrong, my fine fellow — ha! — ha!” — as the dog, on hind legs, held up his paws with a most ridiculous pathos of attitude.

“It looks well,” cried Stanley, with some heat — “to be teaching your poodle nonsense — when a friend of yours is on the brink of destruction.”

“A friend of mine! — I have not a friend in the

world, thank heaven! — The bubble has burst, and I have done with the shallow, meaningless name, for ever."

"One who was once your friend, then — one who is your friend still, whatever you may be to him. — Hardress, if you don't interfere, Albert Faulconer will be damaged for life, and I am come to tell you that you may prevent it."

"I don't meddle in his affairs," — replied Hardress, coldly.

"You don't! — but you will, when you hear all. — Hardress, we all think of you — I need not tell you exactly how, but, at all events, you're not a brute beast, like Radcliffe — and, above all, you're no dastard; you won't let another — you won't let Albert, stand in your place, and perish in a quarrel, which is properly your own."

Hardress started up.

"Perish! — Quarrel! — Radcliffe! — Albert! You don't mean — what *do* you mean? — Albert has not got into a quarrel with Radcliffe — He's not going to fight *him* — Oh, heaven of heavens!"

"Yes, but he has got into a quarrel with Radcliffe — and for your sake, Hardress. Radcliffe hates him because he's always defending you — but I believe he did not know he was in the room when he fell to abusing you, just now, till Albert came flashing in, all in a blaze. Such a glorious fellow that Celestial is! — and called him liar and slanderer to his face, and defied him, and challenged him for your sake."

The pale face of Hardress coloured all over; and those stern blue eyes of his were suddenly overcast; tears were in them, but they did not fall. He roughly drove them back with his hand.

"Challenged him! — They're not going to fight — Radcliffe will never be such a brute as to fight *him*!"

"He will, though."

"He won't, though!" cried Hardress; and he strode away without a syllable more.

He met Radcliffe just entering the playing-grounds, and immediately insulted him — not only by words but by action.

"I mean to insult you — for a coward and a shameless liar! — Shameless liar — that you blacken the characters of absent men! — Coward! — that you dare fight Albert Faulconer, and fear to challenge *me*!"

"Fear to challenge *you* — Do I? — Here goes then — I challenge you now — Only let me have done with that fellow, first — and then I'll serve *you* out."

"You will serve me out in his place, if you are a man — You will fight me, who are your equal in size and strength — but you shall give me your word of honour — if honour you have — that, whatever be the event of our battle, you will refuse to meet Albert."

Radcliffe was not sorry for the proposal. He had already been made to feel how much he should lose in public opinion, by fighting Albert! and he was not sorry to get off handsomely by accepting Hardress in his place — the more so, because the somewhat imprudent defiance Albert had made before witnesses, in

his friend's name, rankled in his bosom, and he had determined to seize the first opportunity to challenge him.

"Be it so," he said, sulkily — "time and place."

"Our seconds will settle that — Albert will be mine."

"Hey day! — I thought you were no longer friends!"

"I don't conceive that is a matter with which you have any concern."

And so they parted.

The next day was a half-holiday, and upon the afternoon of that day the combat was to take place.

Hardress returned grave and thoughtful to his own room. Eugene happened to be there.

"Eugene," he said, addressing him, now for the first time since his rupture with Faulconer — "I've been, as you think, hard with you — *I* don't think so — It's the way of us all, and we're the better for it — It does young fellows of your inches no harm to be taught to do what they don't like. — Man, it's the great lesson. — the business of life turns upon it — but you don't understand me."

"Yes, I do — and if I'd thought there'd been kindness at the bottom of it, it wouldn't have put me up as it did — I don't care a muffin for toasting a muffin — but I think it's beneath my father's son to do it because I'm afraid of a thrashing — He's a dastard, who obeys through fear."

"You're not altogether wrong, there — Let by-gones be by-gones — I don't think I'm going to stay very long here — and I would rather go away friends with everybody."

"I'm sure I'm ready to be friends — and now you speak fair, I'll toast your muffin to-morrow, Hardress — see if I don't."

"That's spoken like a brave fellow — If I stay here, we shall understand each other better in future — Aye, you *shall* toast my muffin *to-morrow*, — but that's the last office of the sort I'll ever ask you to perform for me, if I stay here a hundred years — You are not of that sort of stuff — We'll go to our lexicons again, eh?"

Eugene's face showed that he was touched by this speech.

"I will obey the customs of the school, as Albert says I ought to do, and think no shame, order what you will. Next half, I shall have done with fagging, you'll see."

Hardress shook his head.

"Where's Albert?"

"I don't know — I think he's on the river."

"I want to speak with him."

"That's right!" cried Eugene, with more than usual animation — "Shall I go and look for him?"

"Do, that's a good fellow."

Eugene went away.

Hardress might have asked, with Macbeth, "How is it with me when every sound summons me?" — Not

that his conscience was ill at ease. He felt that he had acted the right and generous part. To shield the friend of other days, still dearly loved in spite of all, from what he knew to be a real danger, he had rushed to the rescue, and offered himself in his place.

It is true, the peril was less in his own case. He was of a much larger and more powerful frame than Albert Faulconer, and far better skilled in the noble science of offence and defence; — but to meet Radcliffe was a formidable thing. Not that there seemed reason to anticipate any very serious consequences, anything worse than defeat and very severe treatment. He might be in the hospital in a month after it at worst — yet his heart was unusually heavy.

At first, he tried to shake off the depression — but at length he yielded to it. — These sort of presentiments, be they justified by the event or not, have an irresistible power over the spirits. They appear, at the time, so like intuitions — they force themselves so on the mind, with all the authority of truth, that there are moments when even the least superstitious find them irresistible.

The presentiments of Hardress were vague and undefined, — but they were of some heavy impending evil — in what form, the foreboding voice said not; it might be disgrace, expulsion, to his father's deep displeasure and his mother's cruel distress; it, then, was a forecast of ruptured ties — of severe misfortune to himself or Albert — and, last of all, came a dark shadow, as of death.

One wish pressed upon him with a strange force. He, so cold and so haughty, — so unforgiving when injured, and implacable when offended, — so indifferent to popularity, and reckless of enmity, — now felt the most unappeasable desire, this evening, to be at peace with all the world.

As he walked up and down his little sitting-room, lost in thought, he began to recollect all to whom he had given offence, and those with whom he thought he had cause to be offended. He could not humble himself in person, — that was a condescension impossible to his proud heart — Only with Eugene and Albert could he make in this manner, the attempt to come to a better understanding; — but he did this — He took out his writing-desk, and wrote a few lines conciliating to every one that he was upon ill terms with, asking pardon of those whom he thought he had ill-treated, and offering it to such as he thought had wronged him.

Having done this, his spirits felt somewhat relieved — He locked up his desk, put the key in his pocket, and then he went to the window, and began to watch for Albert.

It was a fine evening in June. — His window looked towards the river — Myriads of boats of all sorts and sizes, were skimming gaily along the water. — He fancied he saw Albert, himself, urging his light skiff swiftly along, and this brought to his remembrance the day when Albert had won the match. — With a species of self-aborrence, never

felt before, he now recollected the ungenerous and bitter feelings that defeat had given birth to in his heart; but then came the brighter recollection, like a sun-beam piercing the blackened clouds — and he saw himself dashing into the water, and saving the envied victor's life, at the peril of his own.

So passed an hour — two hours — but no Albert came.

At last Eugene re-appeared.

"Well — where's Albert?"

"Gone to bed — he says he can't come."

"What did you say?"

"Say — I said nothing — but that you'd sent me to fetch him — but he said he was tired with rowing, and was going to bed, and couldn't come."

"Has he cut me, then, entirely?"

"Yes, I suppose so," said Eugene — but nobody thought you cared much about it — and I'm sure Albert doesn't."

"You're sure of that?"

"Yes, I've heard him say so to Lenham!"

"Is he in bed?"

"No."

"Go, and ask him — stay, take him this."

This, he scrawled upon a morsel of paper. —

"Come to me, that's a good old fellow — I am in a curious sort of humour — I'm forgiving all the world, and I want you to forgive me."

It was enough, and ten thousand times more than

enough; the generous Albert was in Hardress's room in a second, and ready to throw himself at his feet.

"No — no," cried Hardress — "It was all my own fault — all my own violence and injustice — but you won't think anything more of it — 'cause, as how, I've a favour to ask of you — and if you can do me a good turn, that'll set all right *I* know."

It was a delicate compliment — Albert felt it. The colour rose high in his cheek — and the water to those too ready eyes — only glistened there, however, not a drop fell.

He caught Hardress by the hand.

And that was all that passed. — English lads are not demonstrative — or rather not given to express their feelings in many words — a brief sentence and a significant action or two, and all is understood.

"And now, what am I to do for you?"

"Why, stand second — or rather bottleholder to me."

"You don't know, perhaps, that Radcliffe and I, have a fight to-morrow."

"You and he!"

"Yes — he insulted me — and so we're going to have it out."

"When? — how? — why?"

"Never you mind when — how — or why — for I was in such an infernal rage, that I've forgot all *I* said, and *he* said. What I know is this — It comes off to-morrow — and you're to stand my second."

"I! — Why I'm to fight him, myself, first."

"You! — Pooh! — Nonsense, Albert! — you might as well do — what I shall I say — anything most absurd."

"But I shall, and I mean to thrash him."

"Pooh! pooh! — Wait till I've done with him."

"He never said a word about it. I defied him to dare challenge you — Oh, fool! — fool! — and now he has done it — fool! — fool! — worse than fool! Oh, Hardress, forgive me! What business had I to bring your name up?"

"No, nonsense — yours happened this afternoon, eh? This of mine is an old score — so I take precedence of you."

Albert was scarcely to be pacified — until, at last, Hardress succeeded in persuading him to believe that he had no concern in the challenge; and, his mind, for the present, relieved from that bitter apprehension, he set himself, with a cheerfulness belonging to the thoughtless age of manhood yet in its dawning, to prepare everything for the ensuing event.

He does not seem, at that time, to have had a doubt but that Hardress would come off victorious. His faith in his friend's strength and skill was unbounded; he expected Hardress to conquer in every trial of strength or skill — and so, indeed, he most often did.

As regarded himself, he knew well that it was impossible that the result of his fight should be a triumph over the bravo. He had made up his mind to bear a sound thrashing with the heroism of a Spartan —

satisfied that the honour of having ventured to oppose, a thousand times outweighed the disgrace of a defeat from one so much more powerful than himself. He made up his own mind upon the subject, so soon as Hardress had succeeded in convincing him that the priority belonged to himself, in the natural course of things, as first challenger; and, with a secret resolve to have his turn so soon as Radcliffe had recovered from the sound beating he anticipated for him, he gave himself up to the part he felt called upon to act with alacrity.

As he now understood, or rather *misconceived* the case, it was impossible to suppose that Hardress would consent to draw back, or suffer Albert to precede him: so he gave up any further attempt to assert his claim, or dissuade his friend from what he was evidently resolved upon — and which, indeed, according to all the laws of honour, as maintained by the community to which he belonged was unavoidable.

CHAPTER V.

It is four o'clock, on a bright, beautiful afternoon, of this said month of June.

The sky is clear and blue without a cloud; the sun declining, and casting a mellow delicious light upon the oaks of the playing fields; upon the hoary towers of Windsor Castle, and the distant woods of the Great Park; shedding upon every object, an almost heavenly loveliness.

It is a half-holiday, and the playing fields are crowded.

There is an unusual stir and excitement, however, going on among the crowd. Much whispered conversation, and then a dark mass of figures are seen gradually defiling towards a remote field, completely hidden from view by tall hedges, and hedge-row trees.

It communicated with the playing fields by a stile; and, though not strictly in bounds, was much frequented.

How sweet and still the evening draws on; the nightingales are singing — the cuckoo shouting — the stilly hum of suppressed voices, rises from the playing fields — the huge clock at Windsor Castle, goes four and three-quarters.

There is a ring formed, and now the combatants stand prepared for action; eying each other, as if measuring each other's strength.

That of Radcliffe, as the immense muscular strength of his arms is exposed, seems that of a Hercules. The spectators begin to turn a little pale, and to shiver, for every heart beats for Hardress. His brave challenge had secured for him universal popularity.

Albert, alone, is fearless, confident in the skill of his friend.

He seemed infatuated — he *was* infatuated — His assurance that Hardress would triumph, was only to be measured by the passionate delight, with which he looked forward to seeing his friend victorious.

The glory of subduing Radcliffe! — It was all that was wanted to complete the many triumphs, which had elevated Hardress to such a high place in public opinion.

Stanley, and the rest, looked anxiously on. For myself, I abhorred and detested such exhibitions; and, far from being present, I was at that moment rowing down the river, to the greatest distance possible, from the odious scene.

I had not interfered — I had not attempted to persuade, either Albert or Hardress, to abstain from what I thought such a brutal trial of strength. I knew it would be as vain as an attempt to restrain the winds. Upon these matters, their code of honour differed altogether from mine. Albert already triumphed, in the approaching triumph of his friend; and I found, that even to hint the least doubt upon the subject, threw him into a strange passion. Indeed, through the whole of that fearful day, he appeared to me excited to a

most unnatural degree. Had we been living in the old heathen times, of which we learned so much in our studies, I should have believed the demon of discord had taken possession of him.

Hardress seemed infected by the enthusiasm of Albert.

The depression of the evening before had disappeared, and I was told he looked as haughty and unmoved, as usual; and, in his cool way, as secure of victory, as his ardent and fiery companion.

I am not going to distress you, with the details of the odious contest.

Alas! before many rounds were over, it was plain where the victory was to lie.

Radcliffe had the advantage in skill, as well as in bodily weight and power. And Hardress went down — again — and again — and again — till there was a general cry of “Hold — enough! Give in, Hardress! — give in — you’ve no chance.”

“Brandy — brandy!” faintly ejaculated Hardress, as he lay across Albert’s knee. — “Not while the breath is in my body — Albert — Brandy.”

“No, don’t give it him, Faulconer — you’ll kill him. Make him give in — make him give in — he’s had enough.”

“Yes, he’s had enough,” shouted Radcliffe, with a scornful laugh. — “If he hasn’t, I’m ready — quite ready, for a little more; but I think I’ve given the gentleman his fill — though some, maybe, might have taken one more turn, before they’d cry “Hold,—enough!”

Hardress started up.

"Let him kill me, Albert! — but whilst I can stand, I'll meet him."

There was a general shout of applause. Stanley, alone, looked grave.

"The brandy!"

The fatal bottle was handed to Hardress by his second. He took a large gulp — and was in the ring again.

"Are you mad, Albert? Why did you let him go in again?" — but Albert's eyes were flashing like lightning.

And now there is a shout — a very scream of exultation.

It was his last blow — his last despairing blow — but now Radcliffe had began to grow careless, and to despise his adversary. It was the last despairing blow. It took Radcliffe just under the ear — and down — whilst a shout from the by-standers seemed to rend the heaven — the giant fell.

Hardress staggered back, and sank senseless into the arms of his second.

"He doesn't move. — Sure, he's not dead! — See how odd he looks — let him alone — don't touch him. Send for the doctor. No — no — he'll peach. Get some water, and throw it in his face — can't you, any of you? He's not dead — No — no, he's coming to — why, Radcliffe, man! — can't you give one a sign? — Are you dead or alive?" broke from the confusion of voices.

A heavy groan.

"All's right — get some water. Stay — give him a drop of brandy. No, water's best. — Throw it in his face. It was a rare blow — right under his ear. It's a mercy it's not done for him, though."

Gradually Radcliffe recovered from the stunning effects of the blow he had received. — Slowly the giant arose from the earth, assisted by his companions; but his head was still swimming and confused. — Blinded and stupid, it was impossible he could come to time.

But the victory could scarcely be said to belong to Hardress either. He still lay, insensible, across Albert's knee.

Albert sat there, watching the swelled and distorted face of his friend, and anxiously expecting when he should recover himself a little. It was a shocking spectacle — I will not distress you with it. He was scarcely to be recognized — and the slight clothing he wore was soaked in blood.

Stanley alone stood by; the rest were gathered round Radcliffe, really frightened at the state he was in. It was new to them — the state in which Hardress lay after — a fight such as this was a no unusual sight.

"What shall we do?" asked Stanley — "He doesn't come round as he ought — we'd best get him to my dame's and to bed. Have you any water there?"

"No, only the brandy."

"Give us the bottle — There's none of that left; he must have taken it all down in the last gulp — a

famous gulp it was, and a thrice famous blow he gave on the strength of it; but I wish he'd come round."

"Hardress! How is it with you, man?" said Albert, bending down, and speaking as tenderly as a woman could have done — "Cheer up — you've done it — you've floored him — he's carried off the field."

Hardress seemed to hear him — he faintly moved, and faintly groaned.

"Oh, he'll soon come round," said one, named Senhouse — a fellow experienced in these sort of encounters — "Oh, it's nothing — I've seen fellows a thousand times worse than that — No bones broke — only a bloody nose and a black eye. Carry him to bed — and here — here's my bottle of brandy — give him another dose — there's nothing like brandy" — and, opening Hardress's lips, he poured an additional quantity down his throat.

The application only seemed to increase the stupor.

"There — let's carry him away, and smuggle him into bed, or there'll be the d—'l and all to pay soon," said Senhouse.

They assembled a sufficient number of hands — a sort of litter was made of neck-shawls and handkerchiefs: and so Hardress was got to his dame's, and into his bed, without any person but those immediately concerned being aware of the state he was in.

"If he would but speak," said Albert, anxiously.

"Pooh, man! — They never do — Only let him alone," said Senhouse — "Let him have a good sleep — Come along, they're calling names over — we'll

be missed. We must say Hardress has gone to bed with the head-ache — He'll be all right in a day or two."

"I think we ought not to leave him in this way," said Stanley.

"I'm not going to leave him," cried Albert; "Do you think I am?"

"Yes, I do think you are," cried Senhouse, angrily; "If you stay away, too — it'll get wind — and we shall all be expelled, or something of that sort. — Faulconer, it's not like you to play us such an ill turn as that."

With these sort of arguments — with a repetition of which I will not trouble — Albert, who dreaded nothing so much as the imputation of treachery to his companions; or the being the means of getting any one of them into a scrape, was persuaded to come away; — and the more easily, as Hardress began to snore heavily; and Senhouse asserted that all was right now, for he was fallen fast asleep.

When Hardress did not answer to his name, Senhouse spoke for him, and accounted for his absence — saying, he had got a dreadful headache, and was gone to bed, but would be in his place the next morning.

After they came out of the school-room, Senhouse fastened himself upon Albert, to prevent him going to disturb his friend. He did this, I really believe, with a perfectly honest intention, for he knew by experience that there is nothing like a good night's rest, after adventures of this nature.

Albert yielded, sorely against his will. He was restless and uneasy. There was that about Hardress's look which alarmed him, in spite of all Senhouse could say. However, he suffered himself to be over-persuaded; — for he was himself, indeed, weak, nervous, and confused, and excessively miserable, in consequence of the dreadful scene he had gone through.

About eight o'clock he came to me. — I was just returned. — He told me what had passed, and that he did not like Hardress's look.

I was frightened when I heard of the snoring.

"I hope you did not leave him alone," said I.

"Yes, we did — Senhouse said it was the best thing we could do."

"Have you been to see him since?"

"No — they would not let me. They said it was best to let him sleep it out."

"Let us go now."

We entered the house.

All was profoundly quiet.

Everybody was out enjoying themselves this lovely evening, and not a creature to be found in the usually busy scene.

The shocking spectacle of a few hours ago seemed already forgotten by every one. All the boys were engaged at their usual evening diversions.

The shout and laugh might be heard from the distant playing fields — and cheering and cheerful cries from the river, upon which the garden belonging to my dame's house bordered.

But the interior of the house seemed almost ominously still. My dame herself happened to be out that day — a rare occurrence — she was gone to meet a wedding party at Salt Hill.

I felt anxious, and hastened up to Hardress's rooms. His bedroom, as I have told you, was a little slip opening out of his sitting room.

The sitting room was, of course, empty. The window was open, and the cheerful voices from without came pleasantly in. The sun was now just setting, and casting his glorious beams upon a scene of loveliness, which has remained, I scarce know why, impressed upon my memory ever since.

That silver river! — the overhanging trees! — the purple hills, clothed with the forest woods! — the extraordinary beauty of the scene!

Oh, what a world of love seemed written in the characters of the sky.

We came in stealthily — Albert treading with the utmost precaution, and seeming almost afraid to breathe, lest he should disturb the sleeper.

He laid his hand upon the lock of the bed-room door, turned it with infinite care, so as not to make the slightest noise — opened the door a little, and listened.

"He has done that heavy snoring now — he seems sound asleep — perhaps we'd better not disturb him."

I crept stealthily to the door, and listened too.

There was no heavy snoring now, certainly.

The room seemed almost awfully still.

"Listen, Albert — Do you hear him breathe?"

"No, I can't hear him breathe — but they make such a confounded noise out there."

I stole across the room, and quietly shut the window.

Then I came back and listened.

"Can you hear him breathe, now?"

"No," he whispered, "He's in a sweet sleep — Hadn't we better go away?"

But I put my ear to the narrow opening of the door — in vain.

Not a sound.

My heart began to beat in a strange manner.

"I think," I faltered out in almost an inarticulate whisper, "you had better let me steal in, and have a look at him."

He saw the change in my countenance, I believe, and he began to look uneasy.

He opened the door wider, yet still with the utmost precaution.

But there was no breathing sound.

I entered, and looked at the bedclothes.

They did not move!

Hardress lay with his face towards the wall, his light hair, now all dabbled in blood, tumbled about his head.

He lay there, just as they had laid him down. He did not appear to have moved since.

There was neither sound nor motion.

The bedclothes heaved not. The dull-like stillness was unbroken.

I stepped up to the bed, stooped down, and looked into his face, which was turned away.

I saw at once how it was.

For a few seconds I was as if paralysed.

— “What’s the matter — what’s the matter?” — whispered Albert, eagerly — “what’s the matter — he’s asleep, isn’t he?”

“Yes — yes — He’s at rest.”

“But you are trembling, and shivering all over — What’s the matter — Let *me* have a look.”

“No — You had better not.”

And I covered the face with the sheet.

“What are you about? — Are you mad?” — cried Albert, yet still subduing his voice — “You’ll smother him.”

“No — No — Come away — Come into the next room, Albert — Come away.”

But, as a flash of lightning, the truth seemed to burst upon him.

He pushed me away, tore down the sheet — hurriedly looked into the face; — and, roaring, rather than shouting — “Oh, God of Heaven!” — fell, as insensible as the corpse before him, on the bed.

It was a dreadful, dreadful night that succeeded — a night never, never to be forgotten.

The fearful horror written upon every face — The stern and troubled countenances of the masters, who were summoned immediately upon the return of my Dame — The going and coming — the Doctor summoned — only to confirm the truth, and shake his head — And, at intervals, the wailings and shrieks of Albert, heard from a distant room.

Oh, it was awful.

Death is ever, ever awful — but such a death! — So sudden! — So overwhelming! mixed up with such circumstances of folly, sin, and wrong.

Everybody felt wrong.

Every one connected in the slightest degree with the dreadful event felt they had done wrong.

My Dame kept crying and tormenting herself, and vowing that never, never whilst she lived, would she accept a single invitation during term. — The masters were feeling, and justly feeling, that some way or other such things ought not to have been. — Every boy or young man that had made one in the fatal ring, conscience-struck and remorseful, beat his breast.

How Radcliffe felt upon the occasion, no one knew. He was confined to his bed himself. It was not till the next morning that they told him. He received the intelligence in sullen silence, uttering not a single syllable of remorse or sorrow; — but seemed preparing himself to meet the consequences of what he had done with a stoical indifference — that had something in it of the grandeur of fortitude.

Even he was the better, I have reason to hope, for the shock — The rest of us, I am sure were.

I had called for help through the window of poor Hardress's sitting-room, and the fellows who were below in the garden, came rushing impetuously in.

Horror-struck they were. Every cheek was pale — every limb trembling — as, with hurried, nervous haste, they assisted me to raise the senseless body of Albert, as he lay stretched upon the body of his friend.

They carried him to his own bed, — whilst I remained, vainly striving to discover some spark of life in poor Hardress.

Vainly, indeed. He was already growing cold — he must have been dead an hour or two — he probably expired soon after they left him.

Stanley ran for the apothecary — he was out, and we could get no one until after my dame's return. In the meantime I exhausted all my little knowledge of such things, in attempting to restore sensation — but it was all fruitless; and they came, at last, and asked me to go to Albert.

Fresh air, and water thrown into his face, had revived him. He awakened as from a deep sleep.

At first, he did not appear to know where he was, or to have the least recollection of what had happened; but gradually the mistiness of his perceptions began

to clear away; one by one, the circumstances so lately passed, seemed to dawn upon him.

Suddenly he started up with a wild cry, and was rushing out of the room.

"Where are you going?" cried Stanley, catching hold of him.

"Let me go! — let me go!" he shrieked, passionately — "Oh! it's such a horrid — horrid dream."

"You can't go! — you mustn't go — you're ill yourself, my good fellow," said the kind Stanley, soothing him. "Be quiet — there's a good old fellow."

"Quiet! — What are you about? Let me go!" — violently struggling to break loose from the rest, who were striving to detain him by main force. "I shall go mad, if you don't — I must speak to him — I *will* speak to him. Oh, horrible! — horrible! I dreamed that he was dead!"

They were all silent. He looked quietly, searchingly, into each face, one after the other. It was enough — and, oh! but his agony was fearful.

They came to fetch me.

As I entered the room, he uncovered his face, looked up into mine, and, with a cry scarcely human, rushed into my arms, and fainted away upon my bosom.

But, enough of this awful story.

Such things *have* been — but such things are not, I believe, cannot be, now.

This miserable event happened many, many years ago. It was a fearful consequence of that system

carried too far — of leaving the boys, when out of the school-room, very much to themselves — a system, which, when *not* carried too far, forms, I believe, one of the most wholesome parts of the discipline of our public schools.

A discipline, which, upon the whole, however much it may lay itself open to hypothetical criticism — and however difficult altogether to defend in theory — in practice proves of a value, which no other plan has yet been found to equal.

Turning out *men*, rather than great scholars, it may be; but giving a certain stamp of character for courage — generosity — self-government, and right reason, which, with all their many faults, may be called the distinctive attribute of English gentlemen.

I speak of these institutions as they have been modified and improved, during the last thirty years or so, through the exertions of those intrusted with their management. And, though, doubtless, instances upon instances of failure might be quoted, it is my conviction, and, I believe, it will be found to be the fact, that where tolerable attention has been paid at *home* — and where home education is neglected, no seminary on earth can supply the deficiency — every man, without exception, who has had a public school education, rejoices in it — and feels its advantages throughout his life.

The fearful excess to which the liberty and freedom from supervision, allowed to the boys in play hours, had, in this terrible instance, extended — had a

salutary effect in correcting what had become the exaggeration of that which most, I believe, who consider the subject, will acknowledge as in itself a good thing.

Every one felt this horrible affair, according to their different characters, and different relations. There was no want of sensibility in any, however remotely concerned.

But alas! for the unhappy boys more immediately implicated.

Upon Albert the effect was terrible — His passionate regrets for his friend were poisoned by the acutest feelings of self-reproach.

It was in vain that we tried to console him, by endeavouring to prove that for the part he had taken he was not to blame. Conscience is not to be silenced — the voice divine will make itself heard — and most of all in these storms of human feeling.

He recollected his rashness in the defiance thrown out, which, as he understood the matter now, had provoked Radcliffe to the challenge. Then, that fatal bottle of brandy, was like a horrid spectre continually before him. He recollected but too distinctly the remonstrance of Stanley; his own obstinacy in pouring the brandy down the throat of his fainting friend — and he believed, and alas! with but too much appearance of reason, that the dreadful termination was occasioned by the administration of such an overwhelming stimulant, in the state in which Hardress then was.

When the first wild paroxysms of his grief were over, these racking thoughts took entire possession of his mind. Albert Faulconer possessed a frame replete with joyous health — one which it seemed as if no fatigue could overcome — an elasticity of spirit no trouble could subdue. But what availed these good gifts now? — before the evening of the next day he was confined to his bed delirious with brain fever.

It was in this state impossible to move him, and, indeed, his excessive distress excited sympathy in the Masters themselves, gravely displeased as they were. He escaped the disgrace of expulsion. Sir John Faulconer was written to, and desired to remove his son from the school so soon as he should be able to travel. His remorse for the share he had taken in the lamentable tragedy being such, that the authorities had thought it unnecessary, either as a warning to others, or as a means of making an impression upon himself, to resort to severer measures.

The coroner's inquest brought in a verdict of manslaughter against Radcliffe, and he was committed for trial.

I have never happened to meet him again; for, of course, he did not return to Eton. From what I have heard I have reason to fear, that this grievous catastrophe made no beneficial impression upon him.

Radcliffe was totally wanting in those advantages in his home education, which go so far in making the ultimate difference between man and man.

His father, devoted to the accumulation of wealth,

without bound or measure, was of a low extraction, and very narrow education, himself, and had little idea of what constituted real worth — or what we mean by the true gentleman. But he well understood the omnipotence of wealth in this sordid mammon-worshipping world of ours — His son would inherit an enormous fortune — what mattered the rest?

Such a man usually marries a woman of little more value than himself. A pretty, dressy, husband-hunting girl — belonging to a family much in the same position as himself — had in early days struck Mr. Radcliffe's fancy. The young lady well understood how to convert a nibble into a bite. She hooked her prey; and from that day every thought and aspiration of her heart was devoted to the object of attaining to that higher walk of fashion, upon which, in her maiden days, she had looked with such longing eyes. She had not an idea of a duty unconnected with the great social one — of getting forward — nor of an interest, except those belonging to the great world.

The race — and race is something, after all — from which Radcliffe sprang, was sordid, selfish, base — the rearing he received all false and wrong — his natural temper arrogant, violent, and tyrannical.

Alas! what shall we say to these things? Mystery of iniquity! — mystery of mysteries! — Dark as the pitchy night of death.

Upon such a character, so circumstanced, even the dreadful warning he had received was valueless.

Against every rising feeling of remorse or pity he hardened himself.—The voice of conscience he stifled — public opinion he met with the resolute defiance of invariable pride.

He felt that he should triumph over the disadvantages which the exposure of the circumstances in a public trial would throw over him, and he did.

He was very rich—he was very bold—he was very strong—he was supremely insolent.

And everybody found excuses for him.

“So the last state of that man was worse than the first.”

CHAPTER VI.

IMOGENE has now arrived at that sweet age when a lovely childhood ripens into something more sweet and lovely still.

Into girlhood, as we call it now — full womanhood, as it was considered in the days of our mothers or grandmothers — the days of Clarissa Harlowe and Miss Byron.

Thanks to the education she had received, and the unceasing efforts of Mr. Glenroy to call her faculties into action, she was very much formed for her age; and the sweet young face had yet a something of energy and high intelligence in it, which rendered it singular as it was interesting and charming.

Her figure was light and active — grace itself in every movement. Not the artificial grace of the elegantly trained one, but the free, spontaneous, inimitable grace of a rarely excelling nature — that untaught grace, which, we may rely upon it, will never be found except as the cloathing and attendant upon the finest and purest qualities. It is for want of such qualities that we are obliged to substitute something more ordinary and conventional; of which all one can say is, that it is vastly better than negligence and unculture.

Imogene was an exceptional being — she reminded one of the lines of Dryden —

Her pure and eloquent blood spoke in her cheeks;
And so distinctly wrought,
You might have almost said her body thought.

She was so instinct with feeling and intelligence.

You forgot to call her beautiful — you forgot the symmetry of her form — the fine carving of those lovely features — those delicate hands — the light, fairy footsteps — you forgot such mere material perfections in the all-pervading influence of her heart and mind.

You did not remark her mouth was beautiful, but how sweet and kind her smile — that her eyes were fine, but how bright with intelligence and love — that her attitudes were graceful, but what unaffected simplicity and gentleness throughout — that her hand was fine, but how softly it smoothed the sufferer's cheek.

I have her before me now; I see her in all her brightness, goodness, truth, and love — like some sweet spirit of a better world, rather than as a woman.

She was one, and the only one I ever saw, that one did not delight to think "that she was a woman still."

One rejoiced only, that she was herself, and that she was not a veritable angel, but had her abode among the children of men.

What she felt when an account, though but an imperfect one, of what had happened at Eton, reached her, I do not think any one knew.

Her eyes were so red once or twice, that it excited Lady Emma's attention; and she kindly inquired into the cause of her tears; but Imogene seemed not to like to confess it; indeed, I believe, she dreaded the pain

of hearing the subject discussed by any one — especially by a person whom she thought had not ever quite appreciated Albert.

Eugene had, of course, written an account of what had passed, but his narrative was brief and confused. He either did not understand how it had all happened, or did not choose to confess to his knowledge — or did not like the trouble of entering into particulars. The last reason being, perhaps, the most weighty of all.

Eugene's letter had been followed by one from Charlotte Faulconer, with the intelligence that her brother was ill of a nervous fever at Eton, and that Lady Faulconer was gone to nurse him.

A few posts more brought a letter to Lady Emma from "my dame," informing her that Eugene, also, was dangerously ill. It was hoped and believed that his illness would prove to be the measles, but that the medical men were very uneasy about him.

With my dame's letter came a very friendly one from Lady Faulconer. She alluded in few words to her son's illness, and to her own anxiety; but gave a detailed account of Eugene's state, and advised Lady Emma to come to him without delay. She added, that she thought it would be too melancholy, under the anxiety which she knew dear Imogene must be suffering on Eugene's account, to leave her alone at Haughton during her mother's absence, and said that she hoped, as she was in a sort of manner her aunt, and the two girls something like cousins, that she might be allowed to go to Drystoke, and stay with the young

people until Eugene should be out of danger, and Lady Emma able to return home.

"Lady Faulconer is very kind, my love, to think of it. You would like to go to Drystoke, should you not? You will be very forlorn here."

Imogene lifted up her head, and a bright ray broke through her tears — she had been weeping bitterly, upon hearing of Eugene's danger.

"Dear Lady Faulconer! How kind of her, in all her distress, to think of me. Thank you, dear Mamma — I should like to go to Drystoke, if you please — I should be so unhappy whilst you were away."

Her heart quite yearned to Drystoke. There, too, she should be at hand to hear the first intelligence of Albert.

"You know, my love, you will get my letters from Eton within a few hours — as early as you would have them here. I am glad you will go — it will be a relief to me to know that you are there — but I was afraid you would not like it much, now your Aunt Ulick is gone — I don't think the Miss Faulconers can be particularly to your taste."

"I know so few girls," said Imogene — "that I have not much choice of friends, dear Mamma — and they are both very good-natured to me — Laura is really a nice little thing — so loving and good-humoured."

And she grows excessively pretty — But, enough of them — Ring, my dear, and let me give orders — We will both have luncheon, and by that time they

will have packed what we want — and we can be off, our several ways, by two o'clock — Our darling Eugene — Yet, I wonder at myself — In spite of all they say, I have no fear but we shall get him through."

As sometimes happens — the call for exertion had roused Lady Emma's spirits. She had so long and morbidly dwelt upon one particular class of anxieties, that, to have them exchanged, though it were but for another, was quite a relief. Then, Imogene's unaffected grief, and burst of tears, when she heard of Eugene's danger, was precious balm to poor Emma's sore heart.

"May I read Lady Faulconer's letter, Mamma?" asked Imogene, timidly, as her mother rose to quit the room, leaving the letter lying upon her sofa table.

"Did I not give it you? — Yes, dear — read it by all means — It gives a more encouraging account of our darling Eugene than 'my Dame's' does — Don't vex yourself, dear Moggie," — coming back and kissing her — "don't cry your dear eyes out — He will be spared to us — I have no fear but he will — I wish," she added, "poor Lady Faulconer had as little cause for distress about Albert. — Thank heaven, illness is the only anxiety we have to suffer about our own Eugene — How well he must have managed to keep himself clear of this dreadful affair."

Imogene coloured, but her mother did not perceive it. She took up the letter. Over and over again

did she read the few brief lines dedicated to the subject of Albert. Little satisfaction could she gain from them, except from one short sentence — “You must suspend your judgment upon this lamentable affair until we meet — I will only now, say, *en passant* — that distress for the loss of his friend, is the sole cause of my poor boy’s illness. — He does not, and he has no reason, to feel self-reproach for the share he was forced to take in it.”

That was all. But that assurance was everything — Her heart had told her this before — She had mentally acquitted Albert of all blame — He *could* not be to blame — He was so generous, so high-spirited — yet so sweet-tempered, and so clever; — but it was an immense comfort to have her own persuasions thus confirmed.

She stopped not to say to herself that these were the words of a partial mother; — she took the full comfort they were calculated to convey.

There was little sympathy between herself and Albert’s sisters, — still she loved to be with them — She loved Drystoke — She loved Lady Faulconer, too — Lady Faulconer was so kind — They were all, indeed, so kind. — She was very glad that her mother had consented to the plan proposed.

She set out, her spirits subdued, rather than broken down. No danger was apprehended for Albert’s life — He would get better, Eugene would get better, they should all be happy again.

She arrived at Drystoke about eight o'clock in the evening. It was now the latter end of June — the weather was delicious, and Drystoke in all its exceeding beauty.

It stood at the termination of a gorge, which ran up a distant spur of that chain of hills which furnished Armidale with its mineral treasures. This gorge, or glen, as it would have been called in Scotland, widened suddenly about a quarter of a mile behind the house, which stood upon a pleasant elevation, the last rising ground, in fact, where the mountains fell into the plain beneath. This platform was disposed in charming walks and terraced flower gardens, with fountains and canals, and dressed grounds and plantations, — and the rising ground behind, where the rocks, every here and there, broke through the surface, was covered with natural wood of great beauty; — such beauty as belongs to those native woods of the more northern counties, where oak and holly, and mountain ash, and the willow and the birch, mingle together with a wildness so charming.

We, perhaps, miss there, the fine spreading beeches, the towering elms of the south; but, for variety of tints, and for all the delights which the wild woods' fragrance affords, I think them unrivalled.

At a little distance from the house, the gorge, as I have said, suddenly narrowed into what was scarcely more than a fissure in the hills, broken with rocks and cloathed with all manner of underwood; down it a pebbly stream, clear as crystal, murmured.

Haughton Castle was, in every respect, a very much nobler and finer place than Drystoke; yet there was that in Drystoke, which Imogene loved almost better. The wild beauty of the glen; the charm of the terrace gardens; the loveliness of the view, more confined than that of Haughton by the hills, which broke into the plain upon either side, seemed to please her better. It was altogether smaller, more domestic — more home-like.

Sir John Faulconer and his two daughters were in the drawing-room, when Imogene arrived.

The first sound which greeted her, was that of the piano-forte, upon which some one, after a brilliant prelude of scales, struck up a gay, spirit-stirring waltz. It sounded in strange contrast to her feelings. She was no great musician herself, certainly, but could she in any case, have borne to touch her piano-forte at such a time as this?

As the door opened, the music ceased, and Laura was the first to fly up to, and embrace her. "Good news," she cried, they are both better — "It isn't the measles, but Eugene is doing as well as possible.

Charlotte came up to kiss her. Sir John Faulconer rose from his newspaper, threw it aside, and came forward with a pleasant greeting.

He almost started, as the sweet girl raised her eyes to meet his, her face kindling bright with pleasure, as he spoke. It was nearly a year since he had seen her. How charming she was become! — Not so

regularly handsome, certainly, as Laura; but what an enchanting expression in her mouth and eyes.

Upon her side, she thought Sir John Faulconer altered — a thing most unusual for him — he looked really depressed and out of spirits.

“What will you have?” began Charlotte, as soon as the first reception was over; delighted to play the part of mistress of the house — “We have dined rather early, but you know Mrs. Jenkins is famous for her surprises.”

“Thank you, dear — I will wait till tea — I dined with mamma, before I left Haughton — She is gone, as, perhaps, you know, to Eton. But dear, dear Laura! — When had you the good news?”

“This morning’s post — a letter from mamma. It’s the scarlet fever, Eugene has — but the worst is over, and he is going on as well as possible. Do you think,” she whispered, “I should have been at my piano-forte, if he hadn’t?”

Imogene pressed her hand.

“And Albert?”

The very mention of the name, brought a cloud over Sir John Faulconer’s face — but he chose to answer the half expressed question himself.

He is better — and I expect they will leave Eton in a day or two, change of air is recommended — his mother means to take him a little tour along the coast, and I hope he will return to as — much as usual.”

Imogene did not shake her head — but there was something in her countenance that expressed the same

thing, and to it Sir John Faulconer responded, by saying —

“It is a most unfortunate affair, certainly — but Albert had nothing whatever to do with it, except, so far as being second to his friend — a part which no man, under his circumstances, could refuse. The treatment he has received, appears to me unjust in the extreme. But I hope he will show his sense of it, by the high spirited manner in which he takes it — His present depression is merely physical.”

And, having said thus much, he rose and left the room by the balcony which led to the flower garden; looking much more disturbed and annoyed than he chose to confess; for, in truth, he was deeply and bitterly mortified.

His son, it is true, had not been disgracefully expelled, but the request to withdraw him, was mortifying enough.

It was a blight, it was a check in the career of a boy, of whom he was excessively and justly proud — proud, rather than fond, as a careless man of the world, looks upon a child of promise.

“I think papa’s a thousand times right,” said Charlotte, when he was out of hearing — “but I don’t believe Albert will behave a bit as he wishes him — Albert has such a way of taking things — he makes such a fuss about what other people get over, I don’t know how.”

“But Mr. Hardress, and he, were such great friends.”

"Yes, to be sure — Eton friends — boys make such a fuss about friendships — school friendships! They never last — and I don't believe Hardress was an amiable character at all."

"But, surely, he must have had many good qualities, or your brother could not have loved him as he did."

"I don't believe, that sort of school-boy liking has much to do with what people call good qualities."

"School-boy! but your brother is no school-boy now."

"True — he's quite ready to go to the university, which, by the by, is lucky enough — for he can go there almost directly, and that will cover up this Eton brawl."

Imogene was silent — she felt very much shocked — she had never thought Charlotte so unamiable.

Laura sat near, drawing through her fingers the silken hair ears of the spaniel upon her lap.

"How lucky, that Eugene had nothing to do with it," she said.

"Yes," said Charlotte, sharply — "some people have such luck — Imogene needn't care about it; *her* — what shall I call him — cousin — brother — well, her *Eugene* is safe — so I suppose she will not find it easy quite to understand all our vexation about Albert."

Imogene coloured.

"Don't be angry now," said Charlotte.

"I am not angry."

"Then why *do* you go so red — but it's always so, when one speaks of Eugene," and she laughed rather ill-naturedly. "Oh, not angry! only — only — well, I won't tease you about him, any more — but I sometimes wonder that you like him so much; he is as handsome as an angel, to be sure — and wonderfully clever at some things — but he's so capricious, and passionate, and odd, I confess, I like people more in the common way — besides, he's two years younger than you are, I believe."

"That's an odd reason for not loving him," said Imogene, with a little laugh.

"He's just my age," put in Laura.

"What's that to the matter, Laura? You *have* the most extraordinary talent for speaking to the point," Charlotte said ironically.

"Well — I may surely speak," was Laura's reply.

"Who hinders you? — but it would be best to try for a little sense when you *do* speak. Don't you think so, Imogene?"

"I see no want of sense in that she said," was Imogene's reply; and she looked at Laura, and felt pleased with her beauty, and a certain sweetness of expression, rather belied by her temper, which was defective, as the tempers of the weak are apt to become under the dictation of the strong.

Imogene felt a love for Laura, because she knew that Laura sympathized in her affection for Eugene; — but she wanted to hear more of Albert.

"Do you think Lady Faulconer will come home soon?"

"Oh! who knows? She's going to trail that precious son of hers along the south coast, I don't know for how long or for how far. — Rather she than me; for if there is a hateful task in the world, it's the attending to those hipped, nervous people. Grand-mamma — mamma's mamma, I mean — is nervous; you can't imagine what a plague she is. Always this thing the matter, and that thing the matter, till one's tired to death of her complaints — and then set a-crying by the least thing. If mamma says a word — if she only *looks* so as not to please her, the tears are in grandma's eyes, and she looks for all the world like a suffering saint. Saints are of all ages, you know; — one can't call an old lady a suffering angel, can one?"

"Oh! I do hope Albert's not going to take to such ways; but the very name of nervous fever makes one quite sick with fright."

"How oddly you do look, Imogene!" — suddenly turning to her — "Is that your look when you are really vexed? It's not pretty. What have I said or done now?"

"I am always very sorry for nervous people," said Imogene, gently, trying to keep down her anger, but feeling very hot; — "I believe they suffer dreadfully. Mr. Elmsley is nervous, and he is often very ill, indeed; when nobody but those who watch him and understand him know that he is ill at all. I am afraid

your poor grandmamma suffers a great deal more than you are aware."

"She'd be a vast deal better if nobody put that into her head; but she's got a tiresome maid, who's always a-flattering and a-pitying of her."

"Shall we go into the garden," Imogene broke short the conversation by saying. — She hated this habit of criticising and finding fault with everybody and everything, from her heart — but "such was the custom of Branksome Hall."

The way in which the family took Albert's misfortune, did not promise a very comfortable reception when he should return.

Anything like genuine sympathy with his feelings was evidently out of the question.

His father, Sir John Faulconer, soon recovered his usual levity. He had, by long indifference, so strengthened the gay carelessness of his spirits, that serious attention or deep feeling upon any occasion, however important, was, if exerted at all, only momentary. A certain amount of vexation and displeasure he still felt, but anything like sympathy with the honest grief or the painful situation of his son was not to be thought of.

It was his principle, as far as possible, to steer clear of every painful sensation. He looked upon life as a short dream at the best, and thought that the

wisest thing a man could do with it, was to get as much enjoyment, and suffer as little pain during the transit as possible.

Squeeze the orange, before the worthless rind was thrown away.

His heart was not naturally hard — he was incapable of what, in common parlance, we call unfeeling actions. He was never intentionally unkind, far less cruel; but, had his heart been cold and indurated as the nether millstone, he could not have been more utterly without sympathy, for feelings such as those of his unhappy son. He could be tolerant, indulgent, for he was good-natured and careless — but he showed that he considered Albert's sufferings, as the effect of a troublesome, though, perhaps, pardonable weakness, and left it to cure itself in the course of time, as it infallibly would, when the body strengthened.

As for the two girls, there was little to be expected from them. Charlotte was worldly and heartless, impatient of grief, as a waste of time and obstruction of progress, in the way she desired. Laura was of a gentler nature, but so ill brought up, and of so feeble an understanding, that her consolation was little worth the having.

Imogene saw these things with grief and anxiety, and her desire that Albert should come home, before her departure, was extreme. She felt sure that she could find something to say that would comfort him; for she understood him better than the others did.

Her compassion for him was unbounded. She thought his the most cruel of situations; and, though, after hearing the circumstances more in detail, she *could* not acquit him of all blame — this only increased her pity.

Well did she understand what a terrible addition to regret and sorrow for such a loss must be the slightest shadow of self-blame.

A few days passed in this manner, and then a letter came, and that very day, Albert and his mother were to return home.

Lady Faulconer wrote, that they should arrive by dinner time.

CHAPTER VII.

INNOCENT Imogene!

She wondered that her heart fluttered so, and that her colour went and came, in such a strange manner, whilst Lady Faulconer's letter was being read.

The letters came in at breakfast-time. Sir John Faulconer read the passage, which communicated the intelligence, aloud. He was sitting at the end of the table, Charlotte making tea at the head of it. Laura and Imogene, one on each side of him.

So soon as Sir John had finished reading this part of the letter, he folded it with the brief comment of —

“Of course, you will have everything ready for them, Charlotte; but you may as well put off dinner half-an-hour, to-morrow. We will give them a little law,” — and, putting the letter into his pocket, he took up the newspaper once more. Charlotte was busy with her tea-cups, and a good deal hidden behind the tea-urn. There was no one to observe the treacherous countenance of Imogene but Laura; and Laura was playing with her tea-spoon, and evidently thinking of something far away.

It was impossible for Imogene, in the hurry of her spirits, just then, to do more than gulp down a cup of tea.

"But you don't take anything," suddenly broke in Sir John, pushing a buttered roll towards her.

She took some upon her plate, and cut it about — longing for breakfast to be over, and to be able to run away.

At last, Sir John rose, and, giving a few more directions to Charlotte, left the room; and then, as was the usual consequence of his departure, tongues were unloosed, and the female *ramage* began.

"I declare! Papa is incomprehensible. He seemed very much vexed with Albert, and now he makes a greater fuss about getting ready for him than ever he did before — though he always seemed to think the rest of the household were only the 'born thralls' of his son."

"He's anxious about him, perhaps," put in Laura; — "you know he has been so ill."

"I wonder, if you or I had been as ill, if he'd have cared so much about us? — Not a bit of it. Men and sons are the oddest things — to see them together, you'd think they did not care an atom for each other; but, every now and then, it comes out — 'My father' is to be everything — and 'My son — my son, and heir' to be worshipped by all the world, with psaltery, sackbut, harp, and all instruments of music, like the golden image on the plain of Dura. It's no wonder Albert expects to have his own way in everything."

"I don't think he's *very* selfish," said Laura.

"No — I don't suppose he's what people would

call *very* selfish. But he thinks very much and very highly of himself, and that, in my opinion, is almost as bad."

"But he's so handsome and so clever! — one can't wonder; and, though he is a little tyrannical, he's *very* good-natured," argued Laura.

Whilst Imogene felt her cheeks burning, and her eyes kindling, at what she thought the greatest injustice in the world — and in the ardour of that war which she carried on against wrong and injustice, in every shape in which it was possible to resist it, she would have joined her voice to strengthen the feeble half-and-half defence of Laura, but that a something — a consciousness — a bashfulness, came over her.

She felt ashamed of herself for sitting silent, whilst her friend, now under such heavy misfortunes, was thus attacked — but she really could not speak.

Charlotte looked at her, and laughed.

"What do you look so fierce for, Imogene?" she said — "I uttered nothing that was an offence to *you*, did I?"

"I don't think you are fair to Albert," she murmured, in a low voice.

"Oh! And that makes you so angry" — laughing again — "I beg your pardon — I was not aware I was committing an offence against *you*, when I ventured an opinion about *him*."

"I don't like injustice — and I think you were unjust."

"As how? may it please you."

"I don't think Albert is conceited, or selfish."

"Who uses hard terms now? Conceited! I vow I never uttered the word. Selfish! I said I wondered he was *not* selfish. But I never saw anything like you, Imogene — you take up everything so. There is no pleasure in conversation, if one must always be weighing one's words, and if people can't understand the general scope of one's discourse, without all this preaching and explaining."

Imogene was silent — She had her own opinion as to Charlotte's style of conversation, but it was not her office to correct her — especially as a most thankless and utterly useless attempt, as she well knew, it would have been; besides, she was four years younger, which, at their period of life, makes an immense difference in dignity — thence, Charlotte, as a privilege of her superior years, assumed a tone, to which Imogene, in the humility of her youth, submitted uncomplainingly.

She was glad, however, to make her escape into the garden and shrubberies, and to the company of her own thoughts.

It was a lovely morning — promising a glorious, brilliant day — one of those days in which, with her passionate love of nature, she took intense delight; — some way, she had grown into a habit of associating Albert especially with that delight.

It is some years now since I saw them together at Haughton; I believe they had not met very often since; but whenever they had, things had gone on in the old way. In spite of all Lady Faulconer's apparent pre-

cautions to keep them asunder, they were drawn, as if by an invisible attraction, towards each other. In the girlish innocence of her heart, Imogene looked upon Albert as a dear friend; the dearest and most delightful of friends. One who seemed by intuition to sympathize in every thought and feeling as it arose, almost before it was expressed.

A delicious day was not complete — something was ever wanting to its enjoyment, if Albert was not there to share it. All the plans for the amelioration of her people's condition — in which, under the tuition of Mr. Glenroy, she took such extreme interest — were confided to him with the unembarrassed confidence of a young heart that dreamed not of passion — and thought only of affection such as angels might have felt.

But with him, it was already different. He carefully concealed, however, every indication of sentiments stronger and less reasonable than hers. He felt an intuitive dread of disturbing the innocent flow of her feelings.

Owing to various circumstances, it was at this time nearly a year since they had met. With what passionate longings Albert had looked forward to his return home, he had confided to no one — not even to Hardress. The more delicate sensibilities of the man had succeeded to the undisguised admiration of the school-boy. He had begun to regard his love as a hidden treasure — too sweet for any eye but his own.

He was not aware of the change that had taken place in her appearance. She had grown up insen-

sibly to her full height — had assumed the woman's dress, and been introduced, as far as the little introduction of appearing in her mother's drawing-room went, and going in with her and the rest of the company to dinner — when, as rarely happened, there was any company.

But she thought so little of herself, that these changes had been almost unheeded. She still continued, in her old childish way, to sit upon the corner of Mr. Glenroy's chair, and delight the old man's heart, with the same gay and innocent prattle.

Every year, as it passed on, had added to her interest in the great objects of her life, as set before her by Mr. Glenroy; — and he had taken care to increase, with the advance of time, her power of spontaneous action. He had begun, indeed, gradually to withdraw his interference, and to leave the painful part of what was to be done to herself, aided by Mr. Elmsley, who was established as a sort of prime minister to the young sovereign of Armidale. — But all this had come on so gradually, that she was scarcely aware of the difference.

Life fled by, busy and happy. The good understanding between Eugene and herself increased every year; — and, assisted by the observations of Mr. Elmsley, she began to understand, and to find excuse for the wayward character of Genius — that dangerous gift, when not united with a strong sense and power of reason above that of ordinary men.

She became indulgent and tolerant — rare virtues

at her age! — to variations of temper, which she could not understand. She learned to estimate his peculiar and dangerous situation, — without parent, or even friend, justly entitled to exercise authority where it was so greatly needed; and, spoiled as he was by Lady Emma, who, seeming to dread the idea of reproving or contradicting him, yielded to his will and wishes in every way.

Eugene, too, it must be confessed, had become more amiable. As they both grew older, the tyrannical and exacting child had softened into the more reasonable, though still passionate, boy; and the envy and jealousy of his earlier years had been corrected, or, at all events, was shown only by the affectation of a total want of interest in Imogene's pursuits and plans.

And now the fair creature, her bonnet untied, and thrown carelessly over her head, her muslin scarf hanging round her with a negligence such as would have been very symptomatic of danger in Rosalind's opinion, is wandering through the shrubberies and down the path which leads to the little glen, — for she loved that little glen, and its murmuring rivulet, sparkling over the pebble-stones, and the quiet little path, meandering up and down among the trees, and between the rocks, and to see the pyramids of fox-glove flowers breaking out from among the stones and mosses; — and the *Fumaria* hanging its delicate tendrils over fallen trunks and broken branches; — and to hear the stock-dove cooing, and the blackbird bursting forth into song from the brake; — or watch the

wild hawk slowly soaring in the narrow strips of blue sky over-head.

These things she loved dearly, and the more dearly, because the glen seemed all her own. — None of the party frequented it but herself — Neither Charlotte nor Laura, country girls born and bred as they were, seemed to have the least taste for the beauties of nature.

And so she wandered, and thought of Albert, as they had last parted, and of his affectionate shake of the hand, — and his head turned back from the box of his mother's carriage, as she, with Lady Emma and Eugene, remained upon the hall steps, watching them as they went away.

How gay and bright, and joyous, he had been during that visit!

The Celestial Archer! — Yes, Lenham had taught her that pretty appellation, which suited him so well. For, was he not, with his light figure, his bright, sunny hair, and that ardent, animated glance of his, like the Apollo, whose figure she so often looked at, guiding the car of day amid the dancing hours.

And now how would he be?

Poor fellow! — Poor boy!

For he was still boy to her.

She spent the morning wandering by herself, and did not come in to luncheon; but she kept watching the sun, thinking it would never begin to go down, looking at her watch, and wondering if dressing time would ever come.

At last she heard the welcome half-hour bell ringing, and hastened home.

Her heart was beating, as she crossed the carriage road, and anxiously looked for the mark of recent wheels, but no carriage had been up that day.

They were not arrived, then. It was a sort of relief, and a sort of disappointment — but up-stairs to her room she went.

Her maid had laid several dresses out upon the bed, from which to make her choice. Gay colours, or gaily trimmed with pretty flowers — all simple, but all as youth at her age, should be — light and bright.

A kind of instinct within, made her desire a soberer dress that day.

“There is my *gris de lin* tarlatan” she said, “somewhere, is there not?”

“Yes, Miss Aubrey, I brought it — but I did not lay it out. It’s not a pretty dress — dull, *I* think.”

“Show it me”

“Yes; I will wear that to-day, please — and do my hair quite plain — don’t put anything into it.”

“I’ve got such a sweet moss rose and bud — I begged it of the gardener to-day — Do let me put that in your hair, Miss Aubrey — It will help off this *gris de lin*, which is very flat, and don’t, to my mind, become you, Miss Aubrey, at all.”

“Does it not?” and she hesitated a little, and looked again at the dress. Then after a moment’s reflection, “Put it on. — It suits the colour of to-day,” thought she.

They were all assembled in the drawing-room.

Charlotte and Laura, the one in a bright pink, the other in a straw-coloured dress, looking very gay, and forming a strong contrast to Imogene, in her modest *gris de lin* — which, however, was extremely ladylike and delicate, and very far from being unbecoming, as her long glass, I must confess considerably to her satisfaction, had assured her, before she left her room.

The two girls exclaimed as she entered —

“Why, Imogene! what’s the matter? — You look as if you had suddenly put on half-mourning — Is the kitten — or is Beau deceased?”

Imogene smiled faintly, and coloured faintly.

“I felt in the humour for it, I believe — I am sorry you don’t like it.”

“Oh! it’s very pretty, and monstrously becoming,” said Laura.

“Shall we keep dinner back any longer, Sir?” asked the tall footman, who now entered the room.

Sir John was standing with his face to the window, which commanded a view of the approach.

“No. Stay. I hear a carriage. Let dinner be sent up. Your mistress will be here before it is on the table.”

The carriage was heard approaching.

Imogene’s heart beat so fast that she felt almost sick.

“Are you ill, dear?” whispered Laura.

“Oh, no! — it’s nothing — nothing,” was all she could get out.

CHAPTER VIII.

— I know not seems.

'T is not alone my inky cloak, good mother,

Nor customary suits of solemn black.

But I have that within that passeth show.

HAMLET.

THE carriage stopped at the hall door, after slowly toiling up the little ascent.

But no warm-hearted family greeting was there to rejoice the traveller's heart.

Sir John Faulconer remained quietly in the drawing-room, and his daughters followed his example. It appeared strangely unnatural to Imogene, who longed to rush out and receive the new comers, but that was, of course, not to be thought of — and indeed, with that disagreeable feeling of awkwardness which arises on such occasions from not being one of the family, and fearing to be *de trop* at such a moment, she kept herself hidden behind the two girls.

But she might have spared herself this annoyance at least, for no emotion did they, either of them, seem to show or feel.

There was a little bustle in the hall. The footman opened the door: there was again a little delay, and the voice of Lady Faulconer, half insisting, half persuading, was heard. At length she entered, in her green silk travelling dress, reluctantly followed by Albert.

“But, ah! how changed! how fallen!”

Reduced almost to a skeleton; — pale as death; all his beauty gone, and clothed in the deepest mourning — a melancholy contrast to the gaily dressed and rather clamorous group that gathered around the new arrivals.

Sir John, however, though little used to the melting mood, seemed to feel for his situation. His sisters also appeared good-naturedly desirous to give him a cordial welcome; but their manner too plainly showed how little they entered into his feelings.

Albert took his father's hand in silence.

“Well, Albert, have you not even a kiss for your sisters?” — said Lady Faulconer — “I declare, girls, I had no idea it was so late — no time even to wash one's hands before dinner, and I am so atrociously hungry — Albert! Do you see Miss Aubrey? Dear Imogene! I am delighted to find you here — though that sad boy has not a word for you, any more than for the rest of us.”

But Imogene felt it all for him. She saw, by the painful contraction of his pale brow, how intolerable this little scene had been — He looked once or twice wistfully to the door, as if to escape from what he felt it impossible to endure.

When his mother mentioned Imogene's name, he turned quickly round, looked at her, and a strange gleam of surprise and momentary joy shot over him — but only, like a flash of the stormy lightning, to be succeeded by a deeper gloom.

How she longed to sidle up to him, as she would have done, without hesitation, in old times; to take his hand and whisper a few affectionate words of sympathy and comfort — But he was so changed, that a feeling of shyness oppressed her, and she dare not. He was grown as tall as his father, and had the bearing and appearance of a young man — though still in his face lingered some lineaments of the boy.

His beauty, as I said, was all gone; but to her, there was something far more than beauty in the exchange. The face told a tale of so much grief and suffering; and, yet, all that she had so loved and prized, the manly strength and spirit, subdued though it was — the truth, and sweetness combined of its expression, were still there.

He did not come up to speak to her, and she still hung back. She felt strangely embarrassed, and there was a certain restraint and awkwardness, as it seemed to her, about them all. So she retreated to a window at the further end of the large drawing-room, and sitting down, tried to distract her thoughts by looking out upon the garden; — but she saw nothing — the melancholy, heart-stricken figure of Albert haunted her. She could with difficulty refrain from tears.

“Are you very, very, tired, Albert?” asked Laura, “have you come a long way to-day? — You look shockingly pale.”

“I wish we might have dinner,” said Lady Faulconer, impatiently; but as she spoke dinner was announced.

“Miss Aubrey! — Where is Imogene? — Oh, slipped out through the window into the flower-garden, I declare — Albert, you go and fetch her — Come, Sir John, she will excuse us — don’t let us wait — Let us play Darby and Joan for once in a way.” She took his arm, and they went to the dining-room — she, turning her head back and saying, — “Albert, did you hear me?” — At last he moved reluctantly, as it seemed, towards the window.

“I protest the state that poor dear is in is a perfect despair,” she said, with a tone of mingled impatience and pity — “I can’t think what on earth we are to do with him.”

“I never saw a fellow so completely upset,” the father replied, in a tone of vexation — “I thought the lad had had more pluck. Do with him? — send him into a marching regiment, I suppose — I don’t know what else we can *do* with him.”

“Oh, I hope it won’t be quite such a hopeless affair as that! Time, you know, effects wonders — All will come right in time.”

“Time seems to have made little progress in performing a cure, at present, as far as I can perceive,” —

Was her husband’s reply — in the tone of one mortified and out of humour.

Albert, in the meanwhile, most slowly and unwillingly had moved towards the window looking to the garden. There he saw Imogene. She had only gone down the steps, and was now bending over a dwarf tree-rose, covered with bloom, which stood close by.

Her face was half buried in a bunch of full-blown roses. She was so afraid of crying, that she had crept out to recover herself.

She turned, and saw Albert standing at the top of the steps.

"Dinner is ready, I believe," he said; "Will you come in?"

He did not attempt to give her the meeting, or to offer his arm. Having delivered his message, he turned into the room again; — There he waited till she had entered and passed him, then followed her into the dining-room without speaking another word.

She was hurt — deeply hurt.

Was all then forgotten? — Now, that he was no longer a child, a boy, — was all their old affectionate friendship to be at an end? — Could he have met an entire stranger with more killing coldness?

They were obliged to sit down side by side, for those two places only were left for them; — but they did so without again speaking to, or looking at, each other; and they exchanged not one word during dinner.

Albert took no part in the general conversation, except in answer to direct questions put to him by his father or mother; who seemed both anxious, if possible, to dissipate his deep despondency.

Their efforts were not, perhaps, very well calculated for the purpose; but, whether well directed or not, it is certain they completely failed.

Lady Faulconer had, it was plain, hoped something

from the presence of Imogene; but that hope was more than disappointed. To her equal vexation and surprise, the two had met, as it appeared, almost as strangers.

Albert seemed scarcely to look at Miss Aubrey — and she seemed shy and distant with him. It is true, one or two glances had passed, which were not quite so unsatisfactory. One especially when, after he had appeared to be painfully struck with his sisters' gay appearance, as they sat opposite, Albert cast a glance at the sober hue of Imogene's dress, and a sweet and tender pleasure just brightened his tell-tale face. However, he turned immediately away again, and seemed resolved not to indulge the feeling.

On Imogene's side, also, Lady Faulconer had, as she thought, detected one or two stolen glances that were satisfactory; to say nothing of a something about her eyes, which seemed as if she were ready to weep every time she looked at him.

The opportunity for observation did not, however, last long; as soon as the dessert was set upon the table, Albert rose and left the room.

"This is very discouraging," remarked Sir John, as the door closed after his son — "you had given me but a faint idea of the real state of the case — You said he was a good deal depressed; but such a total upset as this I was not in the least prepared for. Where are all the boy's old spirits gone?"

"If you mean his *boyish* spirits — they are gone, I suppose, where all boyish things go — into the land of the has beens," said Lady Faulconer — "At all

events, he feels as a boy no longer — you see how he is grown. What a fine young man he promised to be," she added with a sigh.

"It is a most confoundedly unlucky business — Quite done for him. He'll never again be what he has been — or rather what he might have become, that's plain enough."

"Dear Papa," put in Charlotte — who never scrupled to offer her opinion upon all occasions; being, in fact, persuaded that her sense and abilities were many degrees beyond those of either of her parents — "How *can* you be so down-hearted about him? I, for my part, should say, that where there is this sort of parade of grief, it would not last long — It never does."

Imogene coloured crimson.

"Parade!" she repeated — "Oh, Charlotte!"

Charlotte turned sharply round.

"Yes, parade, I say. Did you ever see such a chief mourner's face in your life — and that suit of sables...! why, he's only fit to play Hamlet. For my part I never believe, where there is so much outward show that there's much very deep inward feeling — it gets rid of itself in that way — You'll see I am right, Papa.

"I heartily wish you may prove so," was her father's answer.

"One thing I'm sure of," continued Charlotte, "that if we are all to make long faces, and put the whole house into mourning, and weep over and ah-

poor! him from morning to night, he'll never get better."

"You know a vast deal about the matter, no doubt," interrupted Lady Faulconer, "A young lady of experience extensive as yours doubtless understands the human heart and its ways better than any one else!"

"If one has not had much experience, one may have what is better — observation," was the ready answer, "and so be able to give a pretty shrewd guess about such things; — but I know well enough how it is going to be — we are all to be sacrificed, as usual, to Albert's humour, and cover ourselves with sackcloth and ashes, because he pleases to be inconsolable."

"Silence, Miss Charlotte," said Lady Faulconer, "and remember who you are speaking before."

She had the grace to make no answer to this reprimand; but, a few minutes afterwards, said carelessly: —

"Have you had dessert enough, girls? — shall we go?" — and so rose, and, followed gladly by Laura and unwillingly by Imogene, who longed to stay behind and hear more, left the room.

"I never did see anything like it," she began, as soon as they had got upon the grass-plot; "the thing is vexatious enough of itself — but what's the use of making such a to-do about it? — A creature's not to be miserable for ever, because an unlucky accident has happened; — and even if Albert was to blame —

which, I dare say, if the truth were known, he may be — one's not to turn trappist at once. Put a good face upon it; that's the way to make the world soon forget it, say I."

Imogene was too angry to stay with her; she walked on, and sauntered into the more distant parts of the garden. Perhaps she had a secret hope of meeting Albert. She wanted to see him again — she wanted to speak to him, when the rest were not there to ridicule her — she wished to break this cold barrier, which seemed, like some evil enchantment, to separate them — but he was not to be seen.

Poor fellow! — Where was he?

Locked in his own room; — he was sitting upon a little couch that stood there, with his face buried in his hands — feeling utterly alone in the world. Sunk in that profoundest, deepest solitude, of anguish not communicated — and, worse than that, with the certainty that, if communicated, it would neither be understood nor consoled.

The deep — deep shadow, darker than that of death, was upon his soul. — Separating him, as the grave might have done, from all the warm kindly feelings of living men. — Alone — alone —

"Free among the dead, like unto those that go down into the grave."

Every object around was clothed in the deepest gloom; not one ray of light broke upon his horizon.

Intense regret for what he had done — yearning cries of the heart after him that was gone for ever — after him who had sprung into the waters and defied

death to save his friend's life, — and whom that friend, by his own rashness and folly, had destroyed.

Now he had at last returned home the melancholy seemed only the deeper. While alone with his mother, he had, it is true, felt that there was little of real sympathy between them, yet she was kind and considerate; — it was not until the whole family circle was assembled round him that he found the depth of that utter loneliness of heart to which he was condemned.

Then the figure of Imogene rose before him — but he drove it away impatiently. He would not suffer himself even to think of her, and all her loveliness. He was unworthy of her, now. She could not, and would not, and, perhaps, never did care for him. She had not even offered him her hand when he came in! She had gone away immediately, as if the very sight of him was painful. But it mattered not. Never, never should he — shipwrecked, heart-broken wretch as he was — desire her friendship again. It was all over — everything was over. Oh, that he were but dead!

These miserable thoughts were interrupted by the footman knocking at the door.

He rose, and unlocked it.

"Tea is ready, if you please, Sir."

"I'm not coming down to tea. Stay — yes — very well."

He went and bathed his eyes and hands, and brushed his hair over his pale face. He had already, in addition to his other sufferings, become tormented

with the fear of making a display of his grief before such unsympathizing spectators.

The dignity of sorrow made him resolve to conceal his feelings, and endeavour, as much as possible, to appear as usual.

"I am glad you are come down, dear," said his mother, kindly making a place for him beside herself upon the sofa where she was sitting, whilst the eyes of Imogene sadly followed that face and figure, to her the more affecting she had ever beheld in her life, and rendered still more so by the evident effort to recover composure, if not cheerfulness.

"Have you been out?"

"No, only in my own room."

"That's a bad place for him, is it not, Imogene? — Imogene, Miss Aubrey, where are you?" turning round.

"Here, dear Madam," said Imogene, rising from the window at which she was now sitting, and moving a few steps forward, then retreating and resuming her seat again.

A cloud darkened Albert's eyes.

"Why, you are quite unsociable this evening, my love — What is the matter with you?"

"Am I?" she said simply — but she coloured — "Nothing — I did not mean to be unsociable."

"Then come and join our party at the tea table."

Albert rose to offer his place by his mother. She took it without speaking. He looked wistfully at her for a moment, but she did not, she could not, raise

her eyes to his — and when next she looked, he had turned away, and, drawing a chair to a table at some little distance, had taken up a book and appeared to be reading.

But Lady Faulconer watched him; and she saw that he was not reading; his eyes were not upon the book which lay open before him, though his head was bent down towards it. With a deep piercing gaze they were fixed upon Imogene — despair — passionate admiration were written in them.

Lady Faulconer busied herself with talking to Imogene. — She seemed afraid lest she should even turn her gaze that way; lest she should catch that look.

She began in a very low voice to talk to her of Albert.

“I am afraid you think him very much altered,” she began in what was almost a whisper —

“Yes, indeed — He seems very, very sadly.”

“He has lost all his good looks.”

“Has he? — I didn’t observe — He is very, very pale.”

“His hair has changed its colour, I verily believe. I never saw such a wreck.”

“Has it? — I don’t know — He looks so unhappy.”

“Poor fellow! — It *was* a shocking thing.”

“Oh! it was a dreadful — dreadful thing — I am so sorry for him.”

“Yes — you have a kind heart” — and she laid her hand affectionately upon that of Imogene — “You

know how to feel for him — You understand him better than his sisters do — you always did.”

“Do I? — Oh, I hope he will be less wretched soon.”

“That we all most fervently desire — We must all do our best — *You* can do more than any of us.”

“I — Oh! no —”

“You used to be such friends.”

“Ah! but that was different — He is so altered — He is grown a man — He makes me afraid of him. He feels, of course, quite differently now. — I am almost a child still. He seems so much older in every way than I am.”

“There you are mistaken — You are more advanced for your age than he is. Indeed, I look upon you as very nearly matched in point of years — so I hope that you will not give him up. See, he has shut his book — I hope he is not going to leave the room — that terrible desire of solitude undoes him. — Albert, my dear, don’t go away — you have not even once spoken to Imogene, I believe, since into the house you came — has he, Imogene?” Giving Imogene a little sign with her elbow, as much as to say — do speak to him.

“I think Mr. Albert Faulconer has forgotten me,” said Imogene.

He turned quickly at the sound of her voice, and a bright gleam shot into his eyes — but at the words “Mr. Albert Faulconer,” uttered in a somewhat constrained voice, he stopped, and saying,

"Nobody forgets Miss Aubrey," — with a slight inclination of the head — he passed by, and went into the flower-garden.

"He was vexed that you called him, Mr. Albert," said his mother. "Why did you do that, dear?"

"I could not help it — I am sorry — Should I have called him Albert, as I used to do?"

"To be sure you should."

"And did it hurt him that I did not? Oh, I *am* sorry."

"I wish you would go after him, as you used to do in old happy days, and tell him so. That *would* do him good."

"Oh, Lady Faulconer, how can I — Yet why can't I —?"

"Why can't you, indeed? — You used to be friends — such real friends. Well, it *is* a pity" — added she with a sigh — "but I see there is no remedy. Laura, for goodness' sake give us a little music, for this is really too dismal. Have you any new waltzes?"

And Laura sat down to her pianoforte, and played a set of brilliant mirth-inspiring waltzes — Enough, as her mother said, "to create a soul under the ribs of Death" — but he, whose soul lay in the shadow worse than that of death, as soon as the sound caught his ear, plunged desperately into the thickets that bordered the garden, and never stopped till he was out of hearing.

And Imogene felt so jarred and irritated by the

sound, that it was only by keeping to her embroidery frame, that she could manage to sit quiet.

She had left the sofa, upon which Lady Faulconer had now thrown herself, and, quite tired out, had fallen asleep. Sir John had walked away to take a look at his hunters — Charlotte, buried in a comfortable arm-chair, was reading the last new novel — Laura, never wearied of her piano-forte, continued to amuse herself with one brilliant piece after another.

The moon rose, and the stars one by one came out, and the stilly creeping sound of the birds was heard in the garden, and the stealthy splash of the fountain contrasted with the brilliant sounds of the piano-forte — and he, the unhappy one, was wandering alone — so utterly alone! — in the dark thickets of the neighbouring wood. Whilst she, bending over her work-frame, thought only of him, and why they could not be as they had always been before — and wondered whether they should ever be again as they once had been.

If he had but known how her thoughts were employed, would his solitude have been so utterly melancholy?

CHAPTER IX.

Tell me not, in mournful numbers,
"Life is but an empty dream!"

* * * *

Life is real! Life is earnest!
And the grave is not its goal;
"Dust thou art, to dust returnest,"
Was not spoken of the soul.

LONGFELLOW.

SEVERAL days had passed away much in the same manner: a general dulness seemed to pervade the house. Sir John continued to joke with his daughters, and laugh and show his fine teeth much as usual — for his careless temper was proof against everything; but Lady Faulconer was out of spirits and anxious, and there was a shadow cast over the whole circle.

"It is so tiresome of Albert," Laura began one morning whilst they were all sitting at their different occupations in the drawing-room — Laura copying music — Charlotte drawing — Imogene, pensive and silent, stooping over her embroidery frame, at which she had become indefatigable. It was a screen that she was working for her mother — the employment and the interest of getting it done before her mother's birth-day she found a great help in the present state of her mind.

"It is so tiresome of Albert," began Laura, lifting up her head from her employment, and tracing figures

with the feather end of her pen upon the paper. "I wonder how long this condition of things is to last. It is almost as if he did it on purpose — What *can* be the use of going moping about in this way — What's done can't be undone — I don't see that it was his fault at all — and if it *was* — there was not much in it."

"I am sure," cried Charlotte, "if people were to go watering the earth with tears for every little thoughtless thing they did, the ground might never be dry — Why, everybody is always doing something or other they had better not — but that's no reason for making one's self miserable, and doing all one can to make everybody else about one miserable — and Albert used to be so different."

"So different!" repeated Laura, leaning her pretty head upon her hand, and still in meditative mood continuing to trace figures with the feather end of her pen. "He is not like the same creature. Such wild spirits as he used to have — and always ready for any sort of mischief, from quite a little boy. It was such fun — for you know nobody *could* be really angry with Albert then — he had something so nice about him — and besides do what they would, they could not daunt him. Nobody was ever known to make Albert cry by scolding him. If he cried — for he did cry sometimes — it was because people *forgave* him. Was not that droll? But it was soon over, and he as merry again as ever — but oh! how different is it now."

"Yes," said Imogene gravely, "it is very different indeed."

"Well," said Charlotte, "it may be rather bad — I don't say it isn't — but what's the use of this everlasting fretting about what's done? — Will fretting do any good? — and it *is* so tiresome of him."

"I wish he wouldn't be so," added Laura.

"But he can't help it" — cried Imogene — "it is impossible he should help it. You talk, Charlotte, as if people could help being in dreadful sorrow — when such a terrible thing has happened — and especially if they had any hand in it. Why, if they have any hearts at all, they must feel it intensely."

"Oh, nonsense! that's just the way you excellent people go on talking, till you persuade yourselves that dolorous faces are better than the three cardinal virtues. Now, do not look so shocked, Imogene — I am sure at first I hardly said a word about it. I put my handkerchief to my eye, and — though I did commit the heinous sin of wearing a pink muslin that day — looked as dismal as possible. But such things can't and oughtn't to last — Why won't he be like everybody else?"

"Because he blames himself, perhaps," said Imogene, in a low voice.

"Blames himself! — That's not very fair of you to say, Imogene, as I told you once before. — Nobody has a right to say *that* of him — *we* none of us do — and papa says it's a scandalous shame to hint at such a thing — and I repeat it, I don't think it very

friendly of you, Imogene, to harp upon that string. — All his *true* friends ought and will affirm steadily, that he has had hard measure dealt by the masters; and it's a great breach of friendship not to back him — for if his friends don't support him, one can very well see how it will go. — That's what papa has always said, — But it's like you, Imogene — so cold!" added Charlotte, passionately.

"Am I cold? — Yes, I must have seemed so," thought Imogene, "and cruel and unfeeling, I am afraid, too. How warmly Charlotte defends her brother! — That is better than being infected with his sorrow, — better to defend him warmly, than to be downcast as I am," — thought she, as she sat couched and self-reproaching in silent compunction before this attack.

Charlotte's heat subsided as quickly as it had been excited.

"Don't be vexed, Imogene," she said, rising from the table, and coming up to her; "I am sure you mean it for the best, — but you see papa hates long faces and fuss, — and besides, he can't bear that Albert should be blamed. He says the best way to make other people believe a story is to believe it one's self. So someway one has got into a habit of forgetting there was anything of blame mixed up with it, — and above all things, one cannot bear to hear *you* allude to such a thing, — and it provokes one for Albert. We have all forgotten it, and nobody has breathed one word to him of the sort. Papa was not the least

angry after the first flash was over, — but you know papa goes into dreadful passions when he is vexed — which, luckily, he is not often, and it does not last long; — but the vexation is, that Albert seems as if he *would* dwell upon it himself — It looks almost like perverseness.”

“Just when we would give the world that he would take a boat at this regatta on the Trent — where he always used to be, — and papa says he will be missed; and declares, that if he won’t go, he’ll carry us all away upon some excuse or another to a horrible sea-bathing place, that we may be from home — so that Albert’s absence mayn’t be marked — And it is my first regatta — and my first ball — and if he won’t go, papa won’t let any of us go.”

“Somebody’s to be sick and want the sea. Who is it to be?” cried Charlotte; “will you, Laura? — I’m sure I won’t: — But papa laughs, and vows he will give a dose to some one or other of us. We shall keep our bed for a couple of days, if that tiresome boy does not set all to rights.”

This sort of conversation, much to Imogene’s irritation and disquietude, lasted some time longer. She was sorry, after all, that Laura should be disappointed, but grieved at the feelings she, though in a milder manner than Charlotte, expressed.

Indeed, her patience and good temper, which were proof against most things, were beginning to be exhausted — so at last she threw down her embroidery needle, and walked away by herself.

Slowly and pensively she descended the flights of steps which led from terrace to terrace of the flower-garden, — listlessly gazing upon, yet without seeing, the beautiful flowers with which the borders were filled, till at last she reached the slopes of green turf which fell towards the little sheet of water now shining in the sun like transparent crystal — and she stood upon the brink some time, watching the various birds that frequented the place, from the little scudding water wagtails, running briskly along the diminutive shore of sand and pebbles; and the water rail delicately tripping it over the broad leaves of the water lilies, to the majestic pair of swans, sailing along in all their majesty, and shaking out their snowy plumage to the sun. The tiny lake was terminated at one end by the noble trees which grew at the entrance of the glen of which I have spoken. The stream that came down it being, indeed, the feeder to this piece of water.

The romantic and beautiful little glen possessed few charms for the family, as I said, and except for the narrow path I have mentioned, and sundry little imperfect ways made through the copse by the neighbouring village boys, bird-nesting or nutting, was almost impervious. This place was an especial favourite with Imogene. She loved its solitude and its silence; its broken rocks, its varied copse-wood, its pyramids of purple fox-gloves, and all the stilly noises of the woodland solitude.

She loitered by the side of the piece of water until at the entrance of the glen she found herself.

It was about two o'clock in the afternoon, and the sun was shining in the full glare of a cloudless sky. The deep shadowy seclusion of the glen was more than usually attractive, and she wandered on, stopping from time to time to admire the colours of the bright blue veronicas and forget-me-nots, which grew upon the sides of the stream, intermingled with the golden spear-worts; and the deep mystery which the branches of tall trees, forming arches over-head, threw over the scene — now and then interrupted by the rocks, covered with curious, many-coloured lichens, and where various rare and, to her, unknown plants might be found growing.

She stopped to gather some of the ever-loved and lovely forget-me-nots, of which she had soon quite a nosegay in her hand, collected at the expense of wetted feet and muslins — she kept adding to her treasures from among the beautiful wild flowers that grew round her in abundance; scrambling about after birds and plants till her spirits rose again, and she forgot the disagreeable conversation which had driven her out of doors.

She wandered on and on, further than she had ever ventured before — but the sun shone brightly through the trees, chequering the path with lights and shadows; the birds sang and chirruped cheerfully among the branches — the blue, yellow, and crimson flowers gleamed forth in such gay and rich abundance, and the faces of rock as they broke through the turf, so

increased in sublimity as she proceeded — that she could not bear to think of returning.

At length the dingle grew sensibly narrower. The flowers were succeeded by a ranker vegetation. The copsewood grew thicker and closer. The rivulet wandered along, almost hidden by the long grasses which fell like dishevelled hair over it. The change was not pleasing to Imogene, who loved the brighter aspects of nature; but she kept following the track of the rivulet, wondering where it would at last lead to. She must find it out, and then she would go home again. It looked very dreary, to be sure, where she was, but the temptation to proceed was irresistible. So on she went until she arrived at a magnificent projection of rock, which stood out, nearly blocking up the passage. — There was a very narrow path leading round it; along this she crept, steadying herself by her hands against the face of the precipice, until she reached the other side, and then suddenly started back, and almost fell into the stream.

There was nothing but a dreary spectacle before her of dark frowning precipices, rising to the sky, over which the stream had forced its way, and fell, a white flashing waterfall, into a small natural stone basin which it had scooped out for itself below. Upon one side of this, the precipice had somewhat retreated, and was broken into ledges, from which several wildly-picturesque trees shot forth almost horizontally amidst the crags. One in particular, a dark-foliaged oak, springing from a cleft above, cast out its broad branches

over the basin, throwing into a shade, almost as deep as night, the small, bare, rocky platform which lay between the receding precipice and the water.

It was a wild, beautiful, and deep solitude. Not a sound but the plashing waterfall broke the silence. Nothing was to be seen but the dark, frowning rocks, the savage, straggling trees, and a small portion of the blue heavens over-head. A dreary feeling of abandonment and desolation, common to such scenes, pervaded it.

But it was not this spectacle, striking as it was, which had occasioned that sudden start. An object presented itself which had made her tingle with terror in every limb — soon to give place to the most affectionate interest.

In the deep shadow formed by the rocks and overstretching oak, a human figure lay extended upon its face. So motionless, that her first impression was that it was that of a dead man; but as, shuddering with a natural horror, she kept her staring eye fixed upon it, she heard a sound — there was a slight motion, and a groan.

Such a groan!

A voice of misery so intense, no human heart could mistake it.

She might have been afraid, under other circumstances, to find herself thus alone with an unknown stranger in so solitary a place.

But the voice of intense misery roused every

kindly feeling of that good heart of hers, and, without a moment's hesitation, she approached the place.

A few steps more, and she was able to distinguish who it was.

It was Albert.

There he lay, stretched upon the ground, his face buried in his hands, which hands were clutched in his hair, as if he were wrestling with fierce agony; whilst from time to time he uttered such groans as made her very heart break to hear them.

He did not perceive her. He was so absorbed in his misery; it was evident he neither saw nor heard anything.

She stood there, that pretty, delicate young creature, in her white dress, like some fair lily in the midst of this surrounding gloom — like a beam of light from a higher and better world in the night around her.

She remained motionless some little while, watching the convulsive struggles of the unhappy boy — listening to his deep groans — and her heart ready to die with sorrow and pity.

It was the first time, much as she had seen of suffering in the course of her peculiar life, that she had ever witnessed such agony. Feelings of shyness — which she did not herself understand — had prevented her expressing what she felt; but now, as she stood a witness of this paroxysm, the new feelings of timidity that had lately tormented her were all forgotten; the old simplicity returned; she was again a

loving and unconscious child, longing to help and comfort, and only withheld by the doubt whether it was right to disturb him. Her old affectionate simplicity returned — she was a loving child once more, and her only impulse was to endeavour to soothe and to comfort one so very unhappy.

So she stood irresolute and hesitating, afraid yet anxious to speak; when, suddenly, as with a fresh burst of agony, he gnashed his teeth, flung his arms above his head, cast his eyes in a kind of despairing appeal upwards, he became aware of her presence, and started to his feet.

He looked so strangely, and almost angrily at her, that at first she felt too much frightened to move — but great compassion, like perfect love, casteth out fear.

The anguish written in his countenance was enough. She came nearer; she went up to him; put her kind, still childlike hand into his; looking up into his face with such an expression of innocent tenderness and pity, that his soul softened; he sank down upon the ground by her side, and, laying his face against her dress, burst into a passion of tears.

She let him weep for some time, then she laid a gentle hand upon his shoulder, and sinking upon her knees by him, and bending her face to his, whispered rather than said, "I am so sorry for you."

He lifted up his face at this, and looked full into those honest loving eyes, which met his — filled with such a simple expression of childlike holy sympathy

and sorrow — that his passion of agony subsided, as by a charm.

“Are you sorry for me, indeed?” he asked sadly.

“That’s what nobody else is.”

“Oh, so very, very sorry; and so they all are.”

“Are you sorry? Are you, indeed?” he repeated.

“I thought you were quite different. I thought you had cast me off, poor wretch that I am! as unworthy of your affection. But are you still the sweet little Imogene?” — looking fondly at her — “that I always thought the dearest and kindest of human beings — and is it possible you could come to seek one so utterly worthless and miserable?”

“But you shouldn’t be so *very* miserable, Albert; you have no reason to be so *very* unhappy. Everybody says so.”

“Yes, I know that’s what everybody says,” he said, with a slight gesture of impatience, as he raised his head, which, as they now sat side by side, he had again buried in his hands. “But, Imogene, if ever you should become such a very wretch as I am — which heaven, in its mercy, forbid — and which you never can be, for you will never have self-reproach to endure. But, oh, Imogene! — if you ever know real misery — then you will understand what sort of comfort is found in being told that you ought not to be unhappy.”

And he turned from her again.

“I wish I knew — I wish I knew” — she kept repeating in a faltering voice, “what to say that

would do you good — but I am so young and unused to things — yet, dearest Albert, I am so truly grieved;” and again she laid her hand gently upon his shoulder. He once more raised his head and looked up, and beheld that gentle, anxious face fixed on his with eyes brimming with tears — this artless expression of sympathy, evidently touched and soothed him. The agony had subsided — he said nothing for a little while, but continued to sit by her, absently plucking at the grass by his side. At length he began, with more composure than she had yet seen in him.

“I will tell you what it is, Imogene. They none of them understand me — they never did, and they never will. — They judge of me by themselves — but we are different. I don’t know why we should be — but we *are*: they have no more idea of what I feel than that stone has — Not because they are ill-natured, but because they cannot enter into it — they wonder ‘*I choose to make myself miserable*’ — as if misery was a wilful indulgence, and not torture, as it is — As if, having done what I have done — having lost, through my own pride and folly, what I have lost! . . . but you never saw him! Imogene, he was the bravest, cleverest, finest fellow! — and saved my life at the risk of his own — and I threw him away, and he is dead and I killed him! — and he loved me and I loved him — as I shall never, never, not while I live, love anything again.” Saying this, he once more buried his face with his hands — and wept long and bitterly.

He was little more than a great boy still. — The child wept the man's agony.

"But you must not go on crying so sadly," said Imogene, softly — "Don't you know that it is wrong — don't you know, Albert, dear, that we must all be patient, and submit to God?"

"Nobody tells us to be patient when we have done wrong," said he, sorrowfully — "*There* it lies — *That's* the sting of it — that's the sting of it now, and it will remain for ever — I may live and grow up to manhood — I may live to be an old man, perhaps — but if I live a thousand years I shall never forget this — because, Imogene, there is something in being wrong that one never can forget — no, never! never! — For that is hell," he added, in a hollow voice.

She was a young creature to enter upon the fearful and mysterious subject of sin and death — and she shuddered and trembled to hear him speak as he did — but the clear reason, the bright and sound understanding with which she was gifted, animated by her warm, large heart, seemed never to fail her.

"But wrong things *are* forgiven, and you know what beautiful things are said in the New Testament about it — about the good shepherd going and looking for the lost sheep; and, when he had found it, loving it better than all the rest of the fold — because he is so pitying of sinners. And that must be true, for when one is sorry for a person, as I am for you, dear Albert — and so doubly, doubly sorry for

you, because you have been wrong as well as unfortunate — one almost loves you better on that account, than one does people that are quite happy and quite right. One understands the blessed Saviour's loving compassion for sinners — as I cannot help loving you, Albert — because I am so sorry for you."

He fixed his eyes upon her, and listened, as if he could have listened for ever.

"The good shepherd! — Yes, that is indeed beautiful. — But is it so? — Is it really there? — I don't know much what is in that Book. I hear it read at church, but I never read it to myself. None of us do, I believe. It's not the custom among us at Drystoke. What you tell me would be, indeed, comforting, if one could only believe it — And I think," he added, cheering up a little, "I almost *can* believe it — because you do not hate me, though you are such a perfect angel yourself — Perfect as you are, you do not hate me — And yet you are not like the others — You don't try to persuade me that I did nothing wrong — You are so good yourself, that you feel *all* the wrong of it — and yet you love me even because I have been wrong — Oh, that *is* beautiful!"

"I think," said the the young reasoner, "what I love you for is, because you are so unhappy at having been wrong — and I think I feel, that if I were in your place, I should be as miserable as you are — I believe I can understand all you must feel — but still, I think, that people are not intended to be miserable for ever — and that where they were not

very, very wicked — the good God must mean they should find comfort somewhere. He is so good, and his compassions fail not. And so, dear Albert, I cannot help saying, that if instead of lying upon the ground, in this desolate place, giving way to your grief, as you do, you would strive to be patient, and bear it with fortitude — and humble yourself before God, and be soft and good like a little child — you would be comforted.”

Oh! how — for many and many a year, how, during his life, would the soft persuasive tones of her voice, the gentle words which fell from her lips, and the image of that kind, earnest face bending over him, recur to his heart — Never, never to be forgotten!

“Oh, Imogene — How can I ever feel happy again?”

“I don’t know about being happy, poor Albert; but I think it is of little use considering about happy or unhappy — If I were you, dearest Albert — I would only think about being *good*. When I am unhappy, it’s my receipt,” she said, with a grave smile, “to try to be doubly good — and indeed it answers.”

“You are an angel from heaven,” he said, fervently.

“Oh, don’t speak in that way, Albert — don’t, pray, flatter me — People do so flatter me — and I am so ashamed of it.”

“Well, then, I will not; — but tell me, darling Imogene, how one sets about being good?” said Al-

bert, with one of his sweetest and most winning smiles; "for I think you could persuade me to anything. Tell me what I ought to do — for, indeed, I am a very distracted and senseless creature."

"Oh! if I were but a boy," she began, with enthusiasm.

"Well, and if you were a boy — what then?"

He began to be much interested, and his melancholy subsided for the moment. They were sitting side by side, at the edge of the stream, just as in the days of childish confidence; and as he watched her face he thought he had never beheld anything so beautiful.

And yet she was certainly not to be called regularly beautiful — but the charming openness of her countenance, the sweet expression of her affectionate eyes, and innocence-breathing mouth, rendered her far more captivating than the most peerless beauty could have been.

"And if you *were* a boy?... But can you wish to be anything but what you are? Can you wish to be a boy, seeing what wretched brutes boys become?"

"All boys are not brutes — you are not a brute. Don't shake your head, I am *sure* you are not. Oh! if I were like you, Albert — a boy! such a boy as you are! — wouldn't I strive hard to be a noble man?"

"And can't you be a noble woman as it is? — and is not that as good?"

"I do try — I will try — I wish I may! But a man! — Oh! that's a different thing."

“How a different thing?”

“Oh! I mean he can do so much! — Such a great, great deal more. Oh, Albert! if you were to be excessively learned, and excessively clever, and excessively good — what a world of poor creatures you might prove a friend to!”

“And cannot you? ... Nay, Imogene, if any one can help a world of poor creatures, who has so much the power as you have?”

“And I mean to do it — I hope to do it,” with her face all in a glow — “Mr. Glenroy says I shall — Mr. Glenroy already lets me do a good deal now — but that’s not quite all I mean. When I see the immensity that is to be done — and what a vast, vast number of wrong, and wicked and cruel things go on — Oh! then I do so wish to be a man!”

“What would you do if you were?”

“I’d get into Parliament.”

“And if you did? Suppose you could not speak, so as to get the people to listen to you” — said he, affected, and almost amused, and impatient to hear what would come next.

“That’s it — I’d *make* them listen to me — and that was what I was going to say. If I were a boy, I’d work so hard that I *would* be clever — and I would make them listen to me — and I *would* do some good. Oh, Albert! so unhappy as you are — poor, poor Albert! ought you to lie upon the ground giving all up in despair! Would it not be better to be strong and patient and endeavour to please God — and

make yourself clever, that you might do good? Because you know, dear, when one has been very miserable one's self, as you have been, one knows what it is — and one can feel for poor, bad people, as no one else can. Oh, Albert! you know what Armidale was before Mr. Glenroy took it in hand — and you can understand what I mean."

"But I have no Armidale."

"No," said she, and laughed — "that's true — but, foolish boy! Is there no good in the world to be done but in Armidale?"

He felt refreshed and cheered as by gushing waters in the desert. His heart almost smote him for the relief — he felt almost remorseful that he could for a moment be so comforted.

His face darkened again.

"All this is fine talking," he said, "but the weight I have upon my soul I must carry with me to the grave — I am a lost creature; and shall never be anything but a lost, useless man."

She turned and looked in his face, so anxiously!

"Oh, don't — don't say so! — don't, don't think so. It is almost wicked, Albert. I don't mean that you are wicked. Oh, no! but the thought is wicked — God is so very, very good — and though what has happened is a terrible thing, — yet, dear Albert, you must not — must not despair. Look up to Him — He sits beyond those heavens — Look at His own blue heavens — which are, in their clearness — His likeness. He who made those beautiful skies must be

so good — *is* so good. The Viking is gone to Him. He's gone to Him, Albert, and nothing is hopelessly bad in the good Father's world — so don't think and look in that way. You are unhappy — you can't help it — but try for better things — and don't waste the time, and the strength, and the powers the great God has given you, in vainly bewailing over what is past."

"You talk *like* my sisters — and yet how *unlike* my sisters. But would you really have me go to the ball and the regatta, with this broken heart of mine? I tell you, Imogene, it is impossible to do it. I don't know what would become of me. I do not know what extravagance I might commit. Oh! can you wish it? What a contrast! — What a fearful contrast!" he burst out wildly — "I see nothing but him, as he lay, all bruised and swollen, in his coffin. I tell you, Imogene, he is for ever before me — and to think of a waltz! — gay music and a whirling waltz! — I am certain I should go mad."

"I would not have you be there for the world. I think it would be a very shocking thing, as well as too painful to endure, to be dancing, and a friend so lately dead. I never thought your sisters right — I have told them so. I would never wish you — I should be sorry, indeed, if you *could* do it."

"Ah! sweet girl! then you feel with me in this?"

"*That* I do. Who could help it? No, dear Albert, the time, I hope, will come when you can oblige your sisters and please your father by being able to appear

and go about like other people — though, perhaps, you never will feel *quite* like other people again — but that time has not come yet — and it was not that, indeed, I was thinking about — it was the wasting your life. I was so afraid you would throw your life away. There is a poor wretched man near us — he was a common sort of man — not like you — but he met with a misfortune something resembling yours — though, perhaps, worse — however, he gave himself up to despair, and wanted the energy to resist sorrow — partly, I believe, because he thought his sorrow a meritorious thing. So he grew at last almost into a moping, moonstruck idiot, and so he goes about. He lives near the works, and I see him often when I go down there — mooning up and down — looking so shocking and wretched, and all but foolish — a helpless burden upon the earth. Oh, Albert! It would break my heart to think you could be like that.”

He seemed very much struck with this last speech. He remained pensive some time, then he suddenly broke out with —

“You are right, Imogene — I see the danger of it.”

Her face brightened.

“You do! — Oh! how candid you are, dear Albert.”

“It is just — I see it — what I might have become — Those people at the house would have driven me into it.”

“Do not let us talk of them, but of you.”

“You care to talk of *me*!” — he said, with a

peculiar tenderness of look and tone, that made her heart begin to thrill, and her colour rise, and threatened to call back her shy feelings. "Now, Imogene, listen then — I see what you mean, and I know what I will do. I will strive to make *amends* — I have led an idle life at Eton, doing nothing as I ought to do, wasting my time, and throwing the means of education away. It is perhaps well that I must leave it, deeply as to do so has wounded me. I see now that my duty is to redeem lost time as fast as I can. I will get my father to send me to a private tutor immediately. This will take me away from home — where . . . well, you will not let me talk of it — but where, in short, I cannot just now be happy.

"You want me to work hard — whatever you want me to do I will do. (Now don't turn your head away.) Because you are a thoroughly sensible girl — though you are the last creature in the world to make a display of it — and what you urge, in spite of the sweet simplicity . . . well, well, I beg your pardon — what was I saying?

"I mean that your advice is good — and I will take it, and you shall see I will *not* throw away my life — I will *not* become a moping moonstruck idiot — I will try to be what you tell me to be — A career is open before me — I am very thankful I have one, and a very plain one. Hundreds of boys are ruined every year for want of a definite object.

"Yes, sweet Imogene — what you say is true.

It shall go hard, but I will *deserve* to be listened to some time or other."

Her head was turned to him again, as with a face glowing with almost rapturous delight, she drank in every word.

As he uttered the last syllables, his eyes, which had been looking forward as if penetrating into a future, full of hope and enterprise, turned to her and caught that look.

He laid his hand on hers.

"But, Imogene," he said, in a softer and lower voice — a voice faltering in its extreme emotion — "I dare not . . . it is too soon — I am not worthy yet — but I will strive to be worthy — Imogene — will you keep that little, little, place in your affection, which I used to hold — which I thought I had justly forfeited — will you keep it open? — And, if I should be — *if* I should ever be — in some degree worthy to fill it — Oh, Imogene! will you restore me to it then?"

Her happiness at these words was such — that she felt as if that one intense joy was enough for a life.

Her eyes fell beneath his — she tried to speak — she could not.

"Not one word, Imogene?" he said anxiously.

She looked up. It was but one glance and one smile.

He asked for nothing more.

He seemed to desire nothing more — he rose from the ground, and she followed his example.

The shadows were lengthening across the valley — the sun was already out of sight. It was full time to return home.

They went down the path together; he leading the way, she following; but neither of them exchanging a syllable.

The brook ran babbling over the pebbles, amidst the garlands of blue veronica, forget-me-nots, and golden spear-worts; the soft breeze of evening whispered among the leaves over their heads; — the stock-dove cooed softly in the brakes; the little birds chirped and crept among the bushes — all was heavenly, calm, and peace; but what was the peace around, to that within their hearts?

What is the sweetest tranquillity of the outer world compared to the peace within — the peace ineffable — that peace which passeth show!

As he opened the little gate that led into the garden for her, he saw the branch of forget-me-nots in her hand.

“You will give me these, won’t you?”

She said not a word, but held them out.

He took them and turned away, going by a side path which led to the back of the house — whilst she went home by the water-side and through the garden, and made her way to her own room; glad to meet no one, and to find she had half an hour still before dressing time.

CHAPTER X.

So through me did the mystic spirit pass,
Till all my being vibrated with love.

Pygmalion — W. C. BENNETT.

LADY FAULCONER was an interested and scheming, but she was undoubtedly a sensible, woman.

And when Albert, in the course of that very evening, managed to get her to himself by proposing a walk in the shrubbery, he found no difficulty in making her coincide in his wishes and plans.

Every one had been struck with his improved appearance at dinner that day. He was dressed with his old attention, no longer betraying by that negligence as to appearance, which had so much annoyed his father, what had been the condition of his mind.

Imogene was more silent than usual, and the colour on her cheek a little deeper; but Albert, almost it appeared as if he would prevent this being observed, exerted himself to talk, as he had never once done since his return home.

The two girls had exchanged looks of congratulation; — Lady Faulconer seemed much gratified — and Sir John's spirits had risen to their accustomed pitch. He laughed and joked with his daughters as usual.

"Mother," said Albert — taking her arm in his as they, having descended to one of the lower terraces, began to walk up and down it — "the first thing I

wish to do is to ask your pardon for all the additional pain I have given you and my father — and perhaps you will be so kind as to tell him so for me; I feel a little shy about doing it myself.”

“My dearest boy, you more than repay my anxiety by speaking in this manner — and looking like yourself, as you do. So, then, my dear, henceforward we may look upon you as restored to us again. That’s like my own Albert — and this engagement,” after a little hesitation, she went on, “which your father has set his heart upon your accepting — and which really is a matter of some consequence to your sisters — may I tell him that you will comply with his wishes?”

“The regatta! Oh, mother!”

“I am sorry to ask you to do it — It was not *my* proposal, Albert — but if you could —”

“No, mother, I cannot.”

“Then, what are we to do? for your father is positive as to not appearing without you.”

“Let me go away.”

“I fear that will not satisfy his ideas of propriety at the present juncture.”

“Mother,” said Albert seriously, but with a quietness which it was an immense relief to her to observe — “I differ from my father — Even if I could go, I do not think that I ought. But I cannot. People feel things in different ways — I, perhaps, not in the right way — I don’t know — but this I *do* know — such an effort as this is impossible — and nothing should persuade me to attempt it.”

"I am sorry," she said, "but I will give you the satisfaction of saying — I think you are right."

"Thank you, mother — and now I will go on — I have made up my mind what to do — I wish to proceed with my education, and not to enter a marching regiment, as I think Charlotte told me my father proposed, as the only thing I was fit for."

"I wish Charlotte would learn not to repeat what she hears. Your father only gave utterance to a sort of despairing impatience at your continued depression. It is the last thing he would wish for you, of course."

"Thank you, mother;" and, with renewed cheerfulness, he went on to tell her his desire to make up for time lost, and immediately to be placed with some competent tutor, that he might begin to read hard, in preparation for the university.

He was already entered at Trinity College, Cambridge. This, he said, would be a sufficient reason for his absence at the time of the regatta, and smooth every difficulty at once.

His mother saw all the advantages of the scheme. She believed that close application to study, and the sense of duties performed, would prove the best remedy for a wounded spirit.

"I quite agree with you, and I cannot tell you what a satisfaction it is to me to find you become so reasonable, dearest boy. I had feared your own reflections would be long in bringing you to this. What other influence —"

But that was a confidence he would have perished

rather than have made to any one of his family. All she could get from him was, —

“I am sorry you give me credit for so little sense.”

But she marked his heightened colour as saying, “It is growing cold, had you not better go in, mother? You will settle it with my father — will you be so kind?” He led her up to the house; left her at the steps of the drawing-room window, and she entered alone.

Her first glance was towards Imogene; but Imogene had taken refuge at that embroidery frame which had so often stood her in good stead during this visit. She kept her head bent to her work, and nothing was to be read in her countenance.

“Well, my lady,” began Sir John — as she took her usual seat on the sofa near which he half lay, half sat, reposing in an immense and most comfortable arm-chair, and looking over “Bell’s Life in London” — “have you made anything out with the knight of the doleful countenance? You have been having a sentimental moonlight stroll together, I find. How goes it? will he give way, or must we be off to heaven knows where? — For my part, I would rather be spared the move, if it might be so.”

“He is — You need not go, dear Imogene,” as she was rising, “I have nothing to tell that you may not hear.” . . . So she sat down to her work again, listening with a beating heart. “Your son, Sir John, is become, I am happy to say, all that either you or I could wish. Albert has an excellent head and a

heart of gold. It is only necessary to give him time, and they are certain to come into play."

"I am heartily glad of it; for I think the tragedy has lasted quite long enough. I began to think he was radically broken up, and would never be good for anything again. I was actually about to write to my friend Sir William Downham to get him a commission in a marching regiment. Well, — so I am to understand he gives in, and consents to behave like a reasonable being!"

"Not literally in the way you wish about going to this regatta — and I think, my dear Sir John, when you consider all the circumstances, I think you really will allow he is right there."

"Heigh day, my lady! *You* deserting to the enemy?"

"Really I feel that it would be not only impossible but improper for him to appear just now at so gay an affair — though I admit the force of the reasons which led you to wish it."

"Thank you for the admission — and then you go and advocate exactly the opposite measures to those I recommend."

"Not exactly — Albert himself proposes another plan. I don't know really how it has come about — but a great change has certainly taken place, and I think you will agree with me that we ought to encourage it in every way. All that fatal disgust to things, which we deplored, seems to have disappeared suddenly, and in the most unaccountable manner."

"Caprice! — Mere caprice!" muttered Sir John;

"I am astonished at your credulity, my lady. Well, go on."

"His wish is now to set hard to work, and make up for the time he owns that he has lost at Eton, boating and cricket-playing."

"And what the deuce would you have had him do better?" cried Sir John, rising from his lounging attitude and sitting bolt upright in his chair — "Would you have had him maundering all day over Greek roots, as if he were going to be a parson?"

"A little Greek does nobody any harm now-a-days... Dear Sir John, the times are changing fast — *are* changed. Men cannot make a figure in the world by merely driving four horses and keeping a good table. Everybody drives four — or, rather, nobody cares to drive more than a pair — and as for keeping a good table, &c., why the very shopkeepers in Fleet Street, and the cotton-spinners at Manchester beat us in that; and, besides, it's almost shocking what educations such people give their children—ours will lose all chance in the race of life if we do not exert ourselves."

Sir John yawned aloud, and stretched as if he would dislocate his arms.

"To the point," said he.

"Well, then, Albert has begged me to petition that he may go immediately and read with Mr. Salisbury. Not that he named the man, but that is the man — I have just thought of him. Our boy wants to work hard for a year or so, in preparation for Trinity, where he hopes to distinguish himself."

"*He* distinguish himself! a puppy! Yes, in a six-oar — Mercy on us, what a world we *do* live in!"

"And why should he not distinguish himself? Albert has plenty of ability."

"Why should he not? Because he's my son and — begging ten thousand pardons, he's your ladyship's son — *bon chien chasse de race* — but I never heard that you, and far less I, were much given to our books."

"But, dear Sir John, it is his own proposal — I did not urge it — and only reflect, pray do!"

"Upon my honour, you are mighty complimentary *this* evening; reflect — *pray do*," — mimicking — "as if it was such a desperate enterprise to bring me to use reflection, even when the interests of my own son and heir are concerned. Well, my lady, I have reflected then — *pray do* — and more upon this subject than perhaps even you have done, and the result of my reflections is, he shall serve his country in a marching regiment."

Imogene uttered a faint shriek.

Lady Faulconer turned quickly round, but instantly resumed her position again.

"I am sure you are not in earnest, now."

"Never more so in my life."

That was not saying much.

"But he has no disposition that way — he wishes to become ultimately, I believe, a Member of Parliament, and serve his country in that rather more distinguished way."

"Hem! — I should not so much object to that, perhaps."

"That is evidently his right vocation, and the proper object for a man of his condition to propose to himself, — and so, dear Sir John, will you authorize me to tell him that you approve of his ideas? He wishes to leave home as soon as arrangements can be made, and to set to work. Nothing will do his spirits so much good. For myself, I rejoice at this change — though I cannot account for it. Some unseen but most powerful influence has been at work, — whatever it may be, it has been of the greatest possible benefit."

Oh, how her heart beat! and how she rejoiced in the shelter of the window-curtain which hung between her and the speakers — what peace of the spirit — what joy — what sweet hopes and satisfactions were hers!

"Well — well," Sir John ended the conference, by saying, as he rose, and, with one or two more energetic yawns and stretches, prepared to quit the room; "have it your own way — I don't know what's come to the world, it's growing sadly too wise for me. Who would have thought of *my* son, of all fellows in the universe, turning out a confounded sap."

"Something better than that, we will hope," said Lady Faulconer laughing; "a great and successful man — and a thoroughly excellent one too," she added, as the door closed upon her husband, "if this unseen influence continues to be exercised over him. I will write to Mr. Salusbury to-night." And she too

rose and went away, leaving all she had said to sink into the young creature's heart, as she thoroughly believed, and intended that it should do. Imogene remained in a state of felicity such as none but the pure in heart can really know.

No egotistical feeling — no return upon self, marred the brightness of her joy. She felt that she had saved him. She felt that he would prove himself worthy — justify all she had ever thought of him. She felt proud — melted, exalted at once; and a sweet security in his faithful and strong affection added a joy inexpressible to her other feelings.

The party met again over the tray with biscuits and wine, before parting for the night. Albert, it is true, was not there — he had gone to his own room, telling Laura, whom he chanced to meet, that his head ached, and he should not come down again that evening. He wanted to be alone. His heart was so full — he wanted, in the silence of his own chamber, to brood over what had passed.

His window stood open — he went and sat down by it, and rested his elbow upon the window-sill and his head on his hands, and gazed into the ineffable beauty of the night — and thought of her — that spirit of peace, truth and goodness, which had come between him and his despair — pointing out the true path, the only path to regeneration and rest. And he did not, like too many I have known, suffer the resolution thus awakened to blaze up suddenly, like some fire of straw, and then sink into ashes. His character

was vigorous, his intellects bright and healthy; all he had wanted was a right direction, and he had found it.

He had found far more even than that, for at the end of the vista of a few well-spent years the bright reward was shining.

Yes; — the time would come. Three or four short years, and he would be a grown man — and when he had redeemed so much of his implied pledge and promise as could be done at the university, he would try his chance.

Try his chance — claim the implied pledge and promise upon her side, which his heart, now bounding with renewed hope, told him had that afternoon been given.

He had put the forget-me-nots she gave him into water. He now rose from the window, took them up, opened a small box of variously inlaid woods, sacred to him, for it had been given him by Hardress, placed the flowers within it, and buried it in the depths of his writing-desk.

And then he returned to his place at the window, to gaze upon the pale and beautiful planet, now rising over the woods; that planet, so suggestive of tender thoughts — and to recall every word, tone and look, of that most blessed day.

And she, sweet thing! was doing much the same. Happy beyond the power of expression, at peace with herself and all the world, and looking forward into life with a thrill of purest, almost divine contentment and hope.

CHAPTER XI.

And my fausse lover stole the rose,
But ah! he left the thorn with me.

BURNS.

SOME years have now elapsed — during which the usual rapid changes have taken place which time produces upon young people at the age of those with whom we have to do.

Mr. Salusbury had agreed to accept of Albert as a pupil, and my father had secured the same advantage for me. We left Eugene at Eton; which he was to quit in two years' time, so as to be at Cambridge before Faulconer and I should leave it. He was to enter as a freshman a term or two before we had completed our stay.

When first I joined Albert at Mr. Salusbury's, he had been there something more than half a year. I had not seen him since we parted at Eton, in a state of intense pain upon both sides. He met me with considerable emotion; but soon recovered himself — and I found, though certainly graver than he used to be, his spirits were restored.

Not the joyous, enchanting gaiety which used so to delight us all — but an equable cheerfulness, which I liked still better. I was astonished too, at the other changes which had taken place in him — he, who had made it almost a principle to study as little as

he possibly could without actually disgracing himself, and had given all his best time and attention to active sports, now worked indefatigably with Mr. Salusbury, and with an energy only to be equalled by that he used to display in boating and cricketing.

His success in his new pursuit equalled that we had been accustomed to in his former ones. But this did not surprise me. We had always been in the habit of saying that, in whatever the Celestial attempted, he was certain to excel.

This was all very well at Eton, but Albert had the sense to perceive that it would not do in the world — that, sooner or later, in the great struggle of life, a man counts not for what he might have been, but for what he is.

He had an object which he never lost sight of; and that was to achieve the distinction Imogene had promised, and merit the prize he was resolved sooner or later to claim.

In short, he was indefatigable. Mr. Salusbury was astonished at his perseverance — and remarked that it was seldom that qualities so brilliant as his were united with such a capacity for work. Our friendship was renewed.

I loved Albert dearly, and took a brother's pride and pleasure in his success; I will not speak of mine. I was silent and retiring by nature, and if I plodded on at my studies, and succeeded in the end, that was nothing very wonderful. I was born to bear burdens, like the most patient of the animal race, though I

sometimes flattered myself, that, like the beast in question, I was not quite so wanting in sharpness, as the world seemed agreed to think me.

As for Imogene, these years were spent by her, as I have reason to believe, in almost unbroken peace.

She was now grown up, and was devoted to the duties belonging to her little empire. Mr. Glenroy often rejoiced over the success of his work.

Under the influences with which he had so carefully surrounded her, she had, indeed, grown up into all that is lovely and excellent in woman.

Gentle, amiable, most loving, and affectionate in her domestic circle, her heart free from every stain of selfishness, vanity, or pride — with a freshness of character like the sweet air of heaven, which gave to her countenance that cheering expression — that animation and goodness, which engaged the love of every one. She was as gay and busy as a bee. Employed upon the affairs of her government during a great portion of every day; the evening was given to her mother, to Eugene, to Mr. Glenroy, and to the enjoyment of that nature in which she took such excessive delight. Under her gracious influences, every thing that had been planned to increase the virtue and happiness of those belonging to her had flourished, and the change from what she remembered of Armidale was such, as — in spite of the disappointments and obstructions to which every attempt at conferring benefits upon a large scale is exposed — sooner or

later, I believe, invariably attends and rewards those who work in faith and persevere.

This success might have been sufficient to supply that living fountain of joy which played up like sweet springing waters in her heart, gladdening the course of every hour.

But there was something more. True love is the rose of youth — its fairest ornament, its sweetest perfume. Withhold it, and, do what we may, life is but a flat and tasteless thing to the warm young heart. Granted, it is the treasure and joy of existence, in comparison with which all of this world's possessions seem bare and tasteless.

This secret treasure — precious hoarded, but hidden, buried in the very inmost chamber of that heart of hers — she possessed in its full perfection, and revelled in the secret joy.

It was all unconfessed, for the time had not yet arrived to confide it even to her mother. And hers was not a disposition to desire any other sympathy, or to gossip with a *confidante* over the sacred subject. It was too sacred, too delicate, to be exposed to human eye but — there it lay to animate and reward every action.

To have done well was to be worthy of him! — and, as far as this world was concerned, that was all she cared for. Not that her love abated in the least for those she had loved all along — her heart was large enough for every affection. Her hidden bliss seemed only to warm and quicken every other senti-

ment. Her dutiful tenderness to her mother, whose delicate health and spirits required so much kind care, was unremitting; her grateful and affectionate observance for Mr. Glenroy; her gentle docility with Mr. Elmsley; and, above all, her firm unvarying affection and kindness towards Eugene, were the admiration of them all.

Lady Emma suffered herself to enjoy the happiness which this blessed influence diffused around — for her craving anxiety to see justice at last done, was, she believed, upon the way to be satisfied. Eugene was growing up into one of the very handsomest young men that almost ever was seen. His talents were almost equal to his personal gifts. He seemed endowed with every quality which adorns, or can make its way to a woman's heart. His position set him above the necessity of the strenuous exertion which is necessary to success in life — so that if natural energy were wanting, it mattered not much — He would receive almost a princely fortune with the hand of Imogene; a fortune that was at the same time justly his own. The time was now approaching when all must soon be revealed; — and Imogene would learn, that when she bestowed herself upon him, it was not as the giver, but as the restorer, of possessions to which she had no equitable claim. The pride of Eugene, which was excessive, would thus be spared, and that false position which so often mars the happiness of an heiress — arising from the jealousy men feel at being indebted to a wife for their possessions,

and which, with a man of Eugene's temper, would have been more than usually hazardous — happily thus avoided.

Mr. Glenroy, too, had lately begun to regard the good understanding which appeared to exist between the young people with satisfaction. It is certain that he for some time had not been able to look upon Imogene — especially at his first return to Haughton after an absence — without a secret pang.

Family likenesses often fail to strike those who live much with each other, — but they suddenly flash upon us when we meet again as strangers, after a long separation; and it was impossible for him to conceal from himself, upon such occasions, the strong resemblance which it was most distressing to acknowledge. Nothing could have brought him to confess it — but it forced itself upon him, and in thought could not be denied. There was a something of Alice Craven in every feature.

The same might be said of Eugene. He was Edward Aubrey again in the bloom of his early years, only possessing greater personal beauty, which he had inherited from his lovely eastern mother.

These resemblances would strike Mr. Glenroy. Do what he would, it was not possible to shake off the impression. He could only endeavour to conceal from others the truth of that conviction which was gradually stealing over himself. It was, therefore, a very great satisfaction to him to observe what a good understanding seemed to exist between the young people.

And, though he never expressed it, he began to share Lady Emma's wishes upon the subject. He knew nothing of love affairs. How should he! Perhaps, if he had pretended to judge for himself, he would have said that the terms the young people were upon did not exactly coincide with his ideas of what passion must be; but women understand these things far the best — Lady Emma was evidently satisfied — and he was glad to content himself with that.

He did not very particularly like Eugene; indeed, he thought him of a self-engrossed nature — ambitious and vain; but there was nothing seriously wrong, and, like most men of his age and character, the external conditions of a marriage were those to which Glenroy attached the greatest importance. This match would set all this perplexity and apprehended wrong, right and straight without injury to any one. He might have preferred young Faulconer for Imogene — but what was a fancy of this kind in comparison with the weighty and substantial reasons, which rendered a marriage with Eugene so much to be desired?

Imogene certainly grew more and more sincerely interested in Eugene's real welfare as years passed over them. The perfectly sisterly affection which she felt for him, seemed, on his side, to meet much the same return. They were so accustomed to be together, to exchange thoughts and sympathies, that they seemed, in a certain sense, necessary to each other's happiness. Imogene felt flat and dull for some time

after Eugene had left home; and, upon Eugene's return, he seemed never content unless Imogene was near him.

She exerted her usual beneficial influence over him, though in a less degree than with some others; — for there was a something of obstinacy and versatility mingled in his character that rendered it one of the most difficult of all to be beneficially guided.

But she was able to sooth his impatient and irritable temper, to soften his susceptible spirit, and to reason him out of some portion of his native jealousy and pride. She made herself a sharer in his various pursuits — ever urging him to make exertions and cultivate his indisputable talents; — and, in short, watched over and inspired him like his better angel.

Thus time slipped away.

With secret rapture, Imogene heard of the success of Albert at the university; — where his indefatigable exertions and his remarkable abilities secured for him every distinction, as the opportunity arose.

The two young people did not meet very frequently during these college years, for Albert spent great part of his vacations abroad, by the express desire of his mother, who was anxious to secure every advantage for him — now that she perceived what he was capable of. She began to anticipate a career of successful ambition as opening before him, which,

until this auspicious change, she had not ventured to dream of.

When the two did meet, to every eye but the penetrating one of Lady Faulconer, they appeared, if anything, to be upon rather less intimate terms of friendship than formerly. This was the case. There was not the slightest intention of concealment upon either side. It was purely the effect of that shyness and awkwardness which attend upon conscious love, natural to their years, and to the honest simplicity and delicacy of their hearts. A little word now and then; — and, on rare occasions, a walk together at some distance from the rest; — a quick glance of intelligent sympathy at times exchanged: such were the precious compensations for this reserve. Albert persevered heroically in the course he had laid down for himself — a course dictated by feelings of honourable pride. His heart firmly resolved not to address her openly, until his university career should be finished, and the distinction he hoped to attain had given a certain justification to his pretensions.

The last summer of his stay at Cambridge he spent altogether abroad; so that they did not once meet. In the meantime, Laura Faulconer had grown up into very great beauty — a beauty so remarkable that the possession of it became quite a leading event in the family annals.

Sir John openly exulted in having one of his daughters a regular beauty, and flattered and spoiled her in every possible way. Lady Faulconer smiled,

and quietly made her own plans. Charlotte was inclined to be cross and jealous at first; — but she was too much a girl of the world not soon to discover that this unreasonable indulgence of temper would prove but a losing game — and, besides, that a beauty reflects a certain *éclat* upon her sisters. So she took up the better-calculated part of appearing to take the highest pride in her sister's perfections, and took to flattering and petting Laura like the rest.

Laura stood a very fair chance of being altogether spoiled, but her heart preserved her — for she possessed a heart, and a heart capable of something better than the mere girlish fancies in which she had been indulged. In spite of the untoward circumstances which had surrounded her from childhood, she was capable of strong and lasting attachments. She loved her family — she loved Albert — she loved Imogene — but her whole soul, poor girl, was given to Eugene.

He had, as usual, not behaved well.

From their childhood, there had been a growing inclination between them, which, perhaps, it may have been perceived, was encouraged by Lady Faulconer, *sub rosâ* — though she affected to be perfectly unaware of it. The dazzling beauty, into which Laura suddenly bloomed up, was plainly not without its effect upon Eugene's excitable imagination; and Imogene, who loved Laura, saw with delight signs of increasing attachment, as she thought, which her own heart taught her to understand.

Yet Eugene's conduct was not very intelligible. He seemed attracted by Laura, in spite of himself, and his conduct to her was wavering and uncertain, — now giving way to expressions of admiration, which the poor young thing could interpret but one way, and yet which, after all, were so vague and undefined, as to commit him to nothing.

This partiality, however, seemed on the increase. The charm of her great beauty appeared to attract him more and more. Every time they met he appeared to be less master of himself, and every meeting but increased the attachment approaching to devotion of the inexperienced and unguarded girl.

Eugene had now been at Cambridge a term or two, and was, in his own opinion and Laura's, quite a man. A man indeed he was become, in external appearance; and if strength of will, indulgence of wayward passions, and, withal, a pretty quick perception of his own interests when his passions did not interfere, constitute a man — he was fully so.

The family from Haughton Hall were now upon a visit at Drystoke, — but Albert was not there. He was at the present time far away in the Levant, or in Egypt, or possibly at Nineveh. His letters, and most interesting letters they were, came regularly to his mother, — and were by her either read to Imogene when at Drystoke, or Lady Faulconer at Haughton; or else they were forwarded to Lady Emma; who, completely blinded by her own views and wishes, read them with interest, and handed them over to Imogene.

Strange that she never remarked the troubled eagerness with which they were received, or the rising colour and glistening eyes with which they were devoured! For Imogene was incapable of dissimulation, though shyness, and a certain awe of her mother — the unhappy result of past years spent in so false a position — prevented any approach to that unreserved confidence which otherwise, with her affectionate temper, must have existed between them.

Laura and Eugene played backgammon together in an evening, but they had done so from children — there was nothing remarkable in *that*. The four young people strolled out to enjoy the moonlight in the garden when tea was over, but they were all there at once, — there was nothing to excite suspicion in that.

Lady Emma, lying netting upon the sofa, did not see — though Lady Faulconer, who stood at the open window, did — that Charlotte had taken Imogene's arm, and that they were walking up and down upon the second terrace; whilst Laura, followed by Eugene, had gone down to the water's edge.

And this was what he was saying: —

"How beautiful the moonlight is reflected upon this motionless mirror! And those dark overhanging trees at the end tipped with silver, and throwing such deep mysterious shadows over the grass! Do you know, Laura, at moments like these I feel as if the world was no longer the same place that it is in the ordinary daytime?"

'The pale round moon looked coldly down;' —

Oh! not coldly, Byron — calmly! — softly! — not coldly; Laura, is it?"

"I don't know why the moonlight is so beautiful, and has such an effect upon one," she said. "There is no colour; it is not so lovely as a fine sunset; yet there is something in it — I don't know."

"You feel it!" he said, warmly; "you feel it as I do — you feel everything as I do — just as I do — you are the only girl in the world that understands me — Imogene is too clever for my taste."

She smiled — She looked so lovely when she smiled!

"Yet, Imogene is so gentle," she said, "one forgets she is clever."

"Yes, she *is* a dear good girl — I did not mean to say a word against her — I would not for the universe — but so merry. She *is* like the daylight — so open, so free, so good-natured, so sisterly — and sometimes so *advising* — and I hate to be advised — but she does it for the best. Why do *you* never advise me, by the by — Because you know I hate it?"

She coloured a little and answered —

"Because you know I can't. It would be a strange thing for me to set about advising one so clever as you are, Eugene."

"But if you took interest in me — the interest," and he lowered his voice, "that I sometimes think — flatter myself ... pooh, nonsense! ... when all the

time I know you don't care for me the least atom in the world — do you, now?"

And he looked up half playfully, half beseechingly into her eyes.

She coloured more deeply — did not speak, but turned those sweetly beautiful eyes upon him, and caught his — so full of meaning! A meaning it was impossible for her not to understand.

"No, I see you don't the least in the world" he said, with a little laugh, and turned away. "I am the most unlucky dog in the universe, I know ... as your eyes are without question ... well, I will not say what *they* are — you might be affronted, perhaps. Truth — unvarnished truth — is never acceptable, eh? But to return to the old subject — why *do* you never advise me? Simply because you do not think me worth advising. Imogene has a greater value for me. She's always teaching and indoctrinating."

"Oh, but Imogene is so sensible, and I am so stupid."

"You look so stupid. Oh, yes! certainly, you *are* very stupid. One feels it so stupid to be with you. One never comes near you if one can possibly help it, you know. But *do* advise me — I would rather be advised by some people's stupidity than by all the ability possessed by others."

Her heart began to beat fast. It would beat in this way when he made these sort of speeches. What would come next? Something definite — something serious — something to assure her of that affection

which she had reason to hope was all her own, and yet that it would be such a comfort to feel certainly assured of. But it was the same now as ever. Nothing more satisfactory than these vague insinuating words — implying so much, and engaging for so little — was to be obtained.

They walked in silence by the side of the water. He appeared to be in deep thought — saying no more, only stooping down every now and then to pick up a pebble and fling it into the lake. At last she turned towards the steps that led to the upper terraces and to the house.

“Are you going in? It is so sweet here.”

“It is time — that is the servants’ supper-bell.”

“I did not hear it — but you are glad of an excuse to go away, I know. You were listening for it — hoping to get released — but you ought not to make ceremony with me, surely. There is no reason why you should stay, because I love this moonlight, and this water, and those nightingales, a thousand times more when you are by. Yes, yes — I see you are impatient; let us go in, then.”

She felt that she ought to go — and yet she longed to stay. He looked as if he wanted to say more. She hesitated; but when he saw she hesitated, he seemed to recollect himself, and saying —

“*Allons donc* — if so it must be,” led the way to the house, which they entered together.

She came in, disappointed as usual; consoling her heart by repeating to herself that, young as he was,

it was not likely he would say anything just yet. She was unreasonable to expect more than he did say.

She sat down by Imogene, near the window; and he went and took a book at a table near, and pretended to read, but kept looking over his book, and thinking how far more beautiful Laura was than Imogene — and wishing that Laura was Imogene, or that Imogene were more like Laura.

Such a soft, dependent, unaffected creature! — whilst Imogene had received quite a boy's education. Not that she was masculine or forward in the least — but she was so perfect. What a tiresome thing perfection in a woman was! — would weary one to death in the long run. It would be a perfect slavery — and yet —

Well, he was too young, thank goodness, to think seriously about such things; time enough this five years hence — or when any one seemed intending to run away with either of the two.

CHAPTER XII.

And shall I see his face again?
And shall I hear him speak?
I 'm downright dizzy wi' the thought —
In troth, I 'm like to greet.

SCOTCH BALLAD.

ANOTHER year has passed.

Albert has taken his degree with the highest distinction — he has been abroad again — and still without returning home.

He has been at Paris and at Rome, but now he is come back — and, at last, they will meet once more.

Lord Ulick was now living at a country house which he had hired about midway between Haughton Hall and Drystoke. At the neighbouring market town an assembly — which is an affair of considerable importance in such places — was going to be held, and Lady Ulick was named among the lady patronesses.

The neighbourhood round the Hazles, the name of Lord Ulick's place, was what is commonly called a good one. There were many families with young people in them near; and the balls had acquired a species of celebrity which insured a good attendance, and which all the neighbourhood made a point of exerting themselves to maintain. It was a matter of course that the stewards and lady patroness for the night should assemble large parties at their respective houses upon the occasion.

Lady Ulick was proud of her office, and most anxious to do herself credit, by bringing a large and brilliant party with her. She had no difficulty in bespeaking the people from Drystoke. Laura was to make her first appearance at this place, in all the splendour of her beauty; and, to Lady Ulick's extreme delight, Albert had written from London, that, though particularly busy at that moment, he would break every engagement rather than not accept her invitation, and should most certainly be there — though he doubted whether he should be able to reach the Hazles to dinner. They must not wait for him — if delayed, he would certainly join them in the ball-room.

There was more difficulty with Lady Emma. She had grown nervous, in consequence of indulging so long in retirement — she felt quite unequal to the exertion. In fact, she was now little fitted to make one in a ball-room — the state of mind in which she had for so many years existed — the alternations of feeling, the hopes and the fears, which agitated her by turns, had seriously impaired her health and spirits; but Lady Ulick, not contented with writing, drove over on purpose to plead her cause herself.

She had set her heart upon having Imogene, the great star of the county, to adorn her party.

“Now do, dear Emma, indulge me this once; if you cannot and will not come yourself — which I am excessively sorry for — let Imogene and Eugene come. I am quite an old married woman now, and you might trust her to me; but if you don't like that, there is

Lady Faulconer — you have intrusted Imogene to my sister's care hundreds of times before this."

"Not in public — Imogene has never appeared in public."

"Why, one can hardly call this appearing in public. When one has lived at Bath, you know, and seen the rooms, one scarcely calls it being in public to go to a ball in a little place like N—, though they have, I own, built a very fair ball-room, and you know it's an excellent neighbourhood; and then I'm lady patroness — and not to have Imogene! — Miss Aubrey! — Lord Ulick's own niece — it would seem almost an affront to the neighbourhood."

Lady Emma still seemed to hesitate.

"You need not be afraid to trust her," persisted Lady Ulick, laughing, "for I've got nobody, I am sorry to say, likely to run away with her. I'm rather short of young men — only Eugene, Mr. Lenham, and the two Templetons, and Jack Harris — you know him, a queer fellow, but he makes fun — he's a crony of Lord Ulick's — and perhaps Albert, who is more like Imogene's brother than anything else — they've known each other so long... at least, he has promised faithfully. He will scarce be able to come to us at dinner, but he engages to join us at the rooms."

Imogene, who was standing by, a not uninterested listener to what was passing, for she had a great desire to go to this ball, felt her colour change at this last speech. She looked — she could not help it — imploringly at her mother.

"See!" cried Lady Ulick — "she wants to go — don't you, Imogene? She wants to go. Come, Lady Emma, do not be cruel."

"Do you really wish to go, child?" said her mother, turning to her; and, struck with something she did not quite understand in the expression of her countenance, she went on — "Do you really care so much about it? I thought you were of my mind — and did not like assemblies."

"Not at all likely that she should be of your mind. I'll be bound you liked assemblies well enough when you were her age — and such a beauty as you must have been then," added Lady Ulick, with something of her accustomed want of breeding.

Lady Emma sighed — she recollected but too well one ball, at least, that was never to be forgotten.

"Does Eugene intend to go?"

"Oh, certainly! I have bespoken him — not the least difficulty with him — but it will be a grievous disappointment, I am sure, to *him*, among the rest, if Imogene is not there. He made quite sure of that — and of dancing the first dances with her, I believe."

This last was a little species of embroidery in which Lady Ulick, when she had a point to carry, seldom scrupled to indulge. Every one knew, by a sort of instinct, when a point was to be carried with Lady Emma, whose name to conjure by.

The conjuration had not lost its power.

"I am sure, my love," Lady Emma said, and now

turning to her daughter, "if you really wish to go, I should be sorry to prevent you; and though I cannot — indeed I cannot — bring myself to appear on one of these public occasions, yet, certainly, with your aunt Ulick and Lady Faulconer, there can be no real objection to your going without me. Would you like it?"

"Like it! — oh, Mamma!" — and she stooped down, and, as in the times of little Moggie, kissed her mother's hand.

"Why, what a little rake you are become all of a sudden," said Lady Emma, playfully.

"Thank you! — thank you!" cried Lady Ulick — "I could kiss your hand myself. This is really very nice of you — and when will she come?"

"She will drive over with her maid, who is a very respectable personage, being no other than her quondam nurse," said Lady Emma — "but I think I cannot spare her before the very day."

She did not, indeed, wish to encourage the habit of much intimacy with Lady Ulick — whom she could not greatly either like or approve.

"Thank you! — thank you! — that will do quite well. Our party are not to assemble till that day."

And enchanted with having gained her point, Lady Ulick took her departure, leaving Imogene quite in a flutter of delight.

It was more than a year since she had seen him — and now they were to meet, and at a ball! A ball! The most public, yet the most private, of all oc-

casions. He would dance with her — she was sure of that — and they should sit down together, and talk as much as ever they liked; and everybody would be too busy themselves to observe them — and it would be still better than being absolutely alone.

Oh! how happy she should be.

And then she began to think of her dress, and to wish, silly girl! for the first time in her life, that she were as beautiful as Laura, and to feel anxious about her appearance, and almost inclined to be downhearted about herself, as true lovers are apt to be.

And then she felt so thankful that Laura was Albert's sister, and so there could be no rivalry between them. In spite of that, however, she wanted to look her *very* best. She wanted him when they met again to think her improved since they had last parted. She knew *he* thought her nice looking then, but she wanted him to think her more so now. And then she laughed at herself, and if she had not been so happy might have been inclined to quarrel with herself for being so foolish. But oh! how she wished the Faulconer girls had been at hand to advise with. Laura had so much taste in dress, and Charlotte knew so well what was best in such sort of things.

"Well, my dear, you seem in a deep study," said her mother; "what is that little head of yours so intently revolving?"

Imogene laughed.

"Oh, Mamma, you will think me too silly. I was

anxious about my dress for this ball — one wishes to look nice, you know.”

“To be sure one does,” said her mother, much pleased. “What do you mean to wear? I always prefer white — yet you look very pretty in pale blue. Suppose we consult Eugene.”

“I am afraid he would hardly condescend to give an opinion, Mamma; but, if he would, I should be so glad. His taste is excellent in everything.”

Lady Emma smiled.

So entirely destitute of advisers as she was, Eugene’s opinion seemed to Imogene very well worth having.

“Well, dear, I will undertake to get an opinion from him before to-night’s post goes out, for you ought to lose no time in writing to Madame D —.

“Yes, dear girl,” she went on, more than usual affection beaming in her eyes, — and yet she had for a long time found it impossible not to love Imogene exceedingly, — “yes, dear girl, we must have you look your best upon this your first appearance in public, or what would Mr. Glenroy say?”

Eugene pronounced in favour of white and silver — gold and silver trimmings being then the mode, and Madame D — received her orders accordingly; and Eugene also insisted upon the common plan of roses for the hair — but Imogene was too happy not to think him quite in the right.

Lady Emma observed with delight that he seemed almost as much interested in the subject as herself.

He was in high spirits, and full of anticipations of enjoyment. He, who was usually so careless and indifferent about things, that it was impossible to tell whether he was pleased or not, was now all excitement and good humour.

The sympathy of their feelings seemed to produce more cordiality than ever between them. They laughed and chattered, and were the very best friends in the world.

"You will dance with Imogene the two first dances," Lady Emma ventured to say, when Imogene had left the room.

"Why, do you think I might? Coming from the same house, I thought we ought not, perhaps."

"I don't think that is a reason, dear Eugene; and I wish you — I wish it — upon her first appearance in public I should like you to be her first partner."

He looked suddenly up — a flush overspread his face — he caught Lady Emma's eye, and dropped his.

"Of course I should like it — be most proud of it," he said.

"Then engage her at once — I am certain it will please her."

And so it did.

She would rather dance with Eugene than with any in the world — save one; and she particularly wished not to dance the first dances with him.

And now see her, with heightened colour, and most

happy face, standing by, whilst nurse opens the interesting box from Madame D —, and first takes out a most lovely head-dress of pale pink roses, that seemed almost shedding their leaves, so lightly and delicately were they put together — and, then, a dress, so pretty, bright, and elegant.

Nurse was in raptures, and Imogene was smiling with pleasure.

“Let us take it down, and show it to mamma,” she said.

Eugene was sitting with Lady Emma.

Imogene blushed, and would have retreated; she felt ashamed and afraid that he would laugh at her vanity.

“What’s that? Come in,” cried Lady Emma.

“It’s Miss Aubrey’s ball dress,” answered nurse, with importance.

“Oh, let us see it, by all means,” said Eugene.

And so nurse entered, displaying the beautiful and distinguished dress to the best advantage — and Eugene looked at it with a strange interest. Imogene was gratified — she had not imagined that he could care so much about anything that only concerned herself. But Lady Emma understood what was passing in his mind — she saw plainly that he was beginning to feel proud of the distinction which his near connexion with this lovely creature would throw upon him.

She felt more assured than ever that all was as it should be. He examined the dress and the flowers with attention, and expressed his approbation in high terms.

"You will beat Laura Faulconer, out and out, Imogene. They can't afford such things as these, and one never gets the *quite* right thing in *economical* ways," he added, somewhat contemptuously, "such as exemplary housewives like Lady Faulconer think it right to practise."

Imogene looked vexed.

"I wish you had not said that, Eugene. It takes the pleasure out of my pretty dress."

He laughed.

"Well, I really believe you," he said, with something of more real tenderness than she had ever heard him express before; — but she thought only of a brother's affection, and was pleased with it. "I really believe you would rather *not* — rather *not* eclipse other girls — for you have less vanity and more real good nature, I will say, than any girl I ever saw in my life, Imogene."

I think I must complete the history of that particular day by taking you, by way of contrast, to Armidale.

You must follow me into a house standing a little apart. It had not the neat appearance which most of the habitations in the district presented, since the judicious plans of Mr. Glenroy had been carried fully out through the cheerful, persevering self-devotion of the young Imogene, assisted by Mr. Elmsley.

Her heart was, indeed, in the work — and it was

a true woman's heart, made up of love, pity, and enthusiasm — as Lamartine has it.

I have been afraid to weary you with a repetition of the same tale, however lovely. Descriptions of persevering goodness, as of complete happiness, are apt to pall upon the reader. But I must indulge myself in describing what passed upon the evening of this day — the one when the ball dress of white and silver, and the head-dress of pale blush roses, had created an almost childish delight in that girlish heart.

The house, then, which we are about to visit, stands apart from the rest — in a solitary nook of the hills, about half-a-mile from Armidale — and, unlike the generality of others in that place, is still dirty, wretched, and dilapidated.

There has been a rude attempt made to crop the little garden that surrounds it, — but half of this small portion is abandoned to unsightly weeds; the thistle, and the nettle, and the colt's-foot, have taken full possession of what had been once productive of much comfort. The hedge has been broken down in several places, and the materials carried away for fire-lighting wood — a species of petty depredation, be it said, by the way, once so common, but now altogether unknown at Armidale. The portion of the garden still under cultivation showed only a few stubbs of stunted, ill-planted Scotch kale — some straggling, half-grown potatoes — and a few wretched remnants of French beans. The little path that led from the broken gate

was strewed with leaves and rubbish, — it evidently had not been swept for many days.

You enter the cottage by what had been once a rather handsome door, but of which the hasp has been recently broken, and find yourself in the large common room, or house place, as it is called in that county. What a scene of dirt and beggary presents itself! The fire is almost out, a few whited ashes are all that remain in the grate, before which two sickly, miserable, half-clothed children are grovelling in the dust and dirt. They are amusing themselves with tormenting a large beetle that they have caught out of doors. Everything around has the air of habitual negligence and disorder. The straw-seated chairs are in holes; the plates and dishes — some huddled unwashed in heaps, others ranged carelessly upon the once handsome shelves and dresser are cracked, chipped, and half in pieces. The corner cupboard stands wide open — but no bright display of well-cleaned glass, and, the pride of such little domiciles, a few silver tea-spoons, are to be seen. A few broken tumblers, with the remains of “drink” still visible, a bottle, marked “cordial waters” — which smells strongly of gin — a tattered, broken-backed Bible — two torn volumes of a pedler’s edition of the English translation of the “Juif Errant,” and a few dirty tracts, lie upon the lower shelf. The table, which looks as if it had not been washed for years, is stained all over with marks of dirty dishes, and the rings left by liquor glasses. But there are symptoms even worse than

these. The signs of recent strife are visible in a more than ordinary confusion in this wretched abode of vice and misery. Chairs have been thrown down and broken — the great fire-shovel lies in the middle of the floor — and upon the edge of it is a fearful stain.

Imogene entered this region of darkness like some angel of light, — her fair hair could scarcely be confined in her white simple cottage bonnet, but shone almost like sunbeams round the pure oval of her serene and touching countenance. She was dressed in a plain white muslin, with a black silk scarf just folded over it. Mr. Elmsley — the grave, the quiet, the unwearied in good, the wise, the excellent Mr. Elmsley — followed her.

She turned round and exchanged piteous looks with Mr. Elmsley, as she entered, and the miserable prospect met her eye.

He sighed and said,

“I fear it is an utterly hopeless case.”

“Don’t say so — pray don’t say so — what will become of them if *you* give her up, dear Mr. Elmsley?”

— she answered sadly. “Poor wretched creature! I wonder where she is. Little ones, where is your mother?”

“Mother’s up-stairs,” said the eldest — “she’s very bad, and she’s gone to bed — father’s been a-beating her.”

“And where’s your father?”

“I don’t know — gone to work, I reckon.”

“Shall we go up-stairs, and see what’s the matter?” said Imogene.

"You had better let *me*. — No, no, you are right — you will do more good than I can — Yes, my dear, lead the way, and I will follow."

She climbed the stairs with some difficulty, they were so slippery with grease and dirt; and entered the room above.

The apartment was of a good size and tolerable height, and had a casement window large enough to make it bright and cheerful; but it was perfectly deformed with dirt and neglect, and the light and air of heaven were almost completely excluded. The latch of the casement was grown over with cobwebs; it seemed as if it had not been opened for months; piles of all sorts of squalid rubbish, rags, broken bits of furniture, dirty tattered books, were piled up upon the window-seat, so as almost altogether to exclude the light; the walls had once been neatly papered, but the paper had been torn down in many places, and hung in deplorable remnants, displaying the brown and smoke-dried walls behind. The four-post bed had, in days gone by, been a comfortable and handsome piece of furniture, but the tester was now broken down, as if by some act of violence, and hung (a wretched memento of past misrule) over the wretched creature there lying upon a filthy mattress, covered with a tattered sheet and most offensive-looking rug.

Her head, resting upon an uncased pillow, was bound up in a checked red handkerchief, under which her face appeared dreadfully swelled. She panted, and seemed to breathe with much difficulty.

"What has been the matter?" The clear, gentle tones sounded like a voice from heaven in that scene of degradation and sin.

The woman raised her head a little, and with evident pain.

"Be you, indeed, come again?" she said. "Be you not yet a-weary of us?—Oh! but you *are* an angel of mercy."

"I would be never weary of coming to you — if it would do you any good," said Imogene, gravely but gently; "but I am afraid almost to come — I do not know whether it is right to come — It seems only to harden you in evil — and may be a bad example for others."

The woman began to cry.

"Don't say so — don't say that, Miss Aubrey. Harden! the only time this heart of mine, which is more like a stone than a heart of flesh — the only time it ever *softens* — is when you come — Heaven's own angel of goodness as you are."

"Don't talk in that way," Imogene interrupted her by saying, with some severity.

"I won't — I won't. But the heart *will* feel, and the tongue *will* speak."

Imogene: But what's the matter? You look very badly, and all in such dreadful confusion below. — Margaret, what have you been doing?

The Woman: Doing? — it's all on *his* doing — that brute's doing. He's been like a rampant mad bull a-tearing and raging about the house, and, at last,

what does he do but seize hold of the fire-shovel, and takes me a blow on the back. It's a wonder he didn't kill me at once — a brute as he is.

Mr. Elmsley: Margaret — is there no fault on your side? — lay your hand upon your heart and tell me truly. Speak truth, woman, if you can do nothing else. What had you been doing? — Where have you been this morning?

The Woman: Never out of the house. Not once out of the house — as I hope for mercy.

Mr. Elmsley: And what had you been doing in the house? Not cleaning it — not making it as it ought to be, a fit place to receive a decent man into.

The Woman: Why, I did what I could — but I was so low — it seemed as if I had no strength in my limbs to move. I was a-forced to sit a bit by the fire, and so he found me.

Mr. Elmsley: Low! And what means that bottle in the open corner cupboard? How much of that bottle had you swallowed yesterday? It was that made you *low*, as you call it, and incapable of anything but hanging about like a nervous good-for-nothing slattern — and then, instead of shaking off the languor which was the effect of your own sin, and trying to make amends by forcing yourself to a little exertion, what did you do? — Don't try to hide it — I know it as well as if I had been present. You took glass after glass of the "cordial waters" to revive you — in plain words, you made yourself drunk with gin.

Imogene: Oh, Margaret!

Mr. Elmsley: And so your husband found you stupidly drunk when he came home for his dinner. His rage and violence sobered you. Yes, you are sober enough now. But who's to blame. — What is a drunken wife to expect — What does she deserve?

Imogene (with an expression of the deepest grief and pity upon her face): Oh, Margaret! who could ever think you would deserve such a speech as that? Oh, Margaret!

But the conscience-stricken woman was silent.

Mr. Elmsley went on: — “You will say your husband drove you to this — that he was fond of the alehouse — and that you were lonely and discontented — and began with only a little drop, just to keep your heart up — but if you did not actually drive your husband to the alehouse, who *kept* him there? He was a gay, thoughtless young man, I know, when you married him. I warned you, Margaret; you know I did, when you were keeping company. I told you that you must prepare, if have him you *would*, for a good deal of difficulty with him. He loved company and talk, and what he calls a cheerful glass — and such company as he loved is not exactly, perhaps, to be got at Armidale now-a-days — so he went elsewhere for it. But what did you do? Did you do your best? — First you cried, and then you scolded; and, when nothing of that sort would do — fool! and worse than fool! — you persuaded yourself, that you who starved at home, had as good a right to a comforting drop as he had — a comforting drop, alas! —

and you went and bought cordial waters. You knew what you were doing, and that they were nothing but disguised spirits, and as such forbidden things here; but they were in small compass, and you managed to hide your sin from your neighbours, and from us all, for some time. But you grew paler and thinner, and more and more negligent and careless, till you became the wretched sloven that you are now — and your husband, who *has* a great deal of good in him, in the main, and who would have reformed, and wished to reform, was driven to despair, and almost into madness, by your courses. Margaret, I do not mean — God forbid that I should! — to justify your husband. Intemperance in a man is a dreadful sin — but a drunken woman! — oh! she is a very fiend!”

Imogene (stooping down towards the woman, whose tears are by this time flowing fast): But, Margaret, you hear what Mr. Elmsley says. You are sorry — say you *are* sorry, — humble yourself, Margaret, and say so — and pray God to put better thoughts into your heart. Don't be a fiend, — don't be that horrid, horrid thing, a drunken woman. You, who used to be blithe, and bright, and gay as a bird, when you lived in our nursery, Margaret.”

The Woman: My head! my head!

Imogene: Let me look at your head.

The Woman: Oh, Miss Imogene, it's not fit for you to see — It will make you sick to look upon it.

Imogene: No, I am not very easily made sick. Oh, mercy! what a place it is!

Mr. Elmsley: It ought to be washed and properly dressed, but there is not even a drop of warm water to be had.

Imogene: Oh, stay a moment, I'll soon blow up the fire and warm some.

And down she went, and gathered together some coals — for of coals every one had abundance at Armidale. No improvidence could exhaust the means of obtaining firing, and she made the children blow up the fire, while she put the old broken tin kettle on. She was soon up-stairs again with a bowl of warm water in her hand, and she found an old rag somewhere about, and with it she cleaned the wound, which appeared much less terrible when washed; and then she laid her own cambric handkerchief soaked in water upon it, and bound it up, and smoothed the pillow, and straightened the bed; the woman looking up to her all the time with an expression of gratitude, almost of adoration.

“That will do,” said Mr. Elmsley, “we will leave you now, Margaret, for you had better keep yourself quiet.”

Imogene: And I will get old Betty Travers to come and straighten the house, for it is quite a shame to be seen; and wash and tidy the children, and set tea against your husband comes home.

The Woman (crying fast): I'm feared as how he never will come home again! He thinks he's killed me! Oh, poor lad! poor lad! — I've ruined him! I've ruined him! — He's gone for a soldier! — He

has often threatened he would — why didn't I heed him! Oh, William! William! I shall never see thee again.

Imogene: Oh, I hope not so! — Do you know which way he went? — Mr. Elmsley, shall we go and look for him? — I am sure you will persuade him to come back when he knows his wife is so sorry. You *are* sorry, are you not, Margaret? — You'll make a better wife to him in future, and he'll make a better husband to you, please God. In His great mercy, all is not lost yet.

With a heavy, sorrowful heart, Imogene left the cottage.

“One almost despairs” — she said — “so often that she has promised better things — will she ever be reformed?”

Mr. Elmsley shook his head.

“A drunken woman is rarely reformed.”

Imogene sighed deeply — “I cannot have managed well — I might, perhaps, have found her out sooner if I had taken the right way. Oh how different it is! — I thought, by this time, there would not have been one drunken brawl in Armidale — and this woman, and only two years ago! What a bright, merry creature she was — she was like a bird on the bough.”

And so talking, they entered Armidale; — and Imogene cheered up as she passed on. It was now evening, and a fine evening — and doors were open, and women were sitting outside at their needles, and

men were resting upon the benches, or standing in knots, cheerfully talking to each other — and children, clean, fresh, and rosy, were running, and shouting, and gamboling about — all was wholesome enjoyment of the hour.

And as she passed along — that fair young creature, bright as the day-beam from on high — the people rose, and saluted, and blessed her. So young, and yet so wise and good! — Even to look upon her was to make men feel happier and better.

Some houses she entered and visited, as she passed by, cheering the aged, and consoling the sick and sorrowful. Wherever she came, peace entered with her, and a blessing followed her; but it was vainly she inquired upon all sides for William. William was not to be found — he never appeared in Armidale again — he was one more added to the victims of intemperance. But I am not going to proceed with this story. I only wish to paint Imogene as she was at that period of her life. Faithfully intent upon discharging her duty. Throbbing, as her heart was, with its own peculiar emotions — nothing could make her forget her charge.

There was much business to be done — for the next morning she was to leave home for Lord Ulick's. She found it extremely difficult to give her attention to what she was about, for her thoughts were most perversely wandering; but she was not to be thus conquered — and, before she returned home, everything that ought to be was effected.

— She was quite tired out before she threw herself into the little pony chaise, and Mr. Elmsley drove her home.

But she came in feeling so happy! Such a bright face it was as she ran up to her mother's dressing-room, and sat down and made tea, and related all that had passed — and her mother listened with more interest than usual, and seemed to take pleasure and to sympathize in the goings on of Armidale in a manner that was a new delight to Imogene. Eugene, on the contrary, displayed, if possible, more than his usual indifference to the subject. Stretched at his full length upon a sofa, he was engaged in reading a volume of Lord Byron's poems. He hated this kind of business, and, moreover, invariably seemed jealous and a little out of humour whenever the subject of Imogene's exertions and plans, as regarded Armidale, was brought up. She was sorry — yet it was but a light trouble after all. People, she thought, were naturally so different. Eugene seemed as if he could not take interest in such things — but there was another. Oh! how unlike!

He knew well how to share in every feeling — all would be as it should with him. Already, she had heard it whispered, that young as he was, he had been invited to take the place of private secretary to an eminent statesman. This would open to him that wide career of usefulness by which she knew he would profit. Her heart exulted at the thought. But this

exultation was a secret known to that heart alone — no one intermeddled with this joy.

Lady Emma listened to the report with apparent indifference, merely saying that she was glad Lady Faulconer should have so much reason for satisfaction in her son, and dropped the subject.

Eugene yawned when he heard of it — and remarked that it was a fine thing for those who liked it to be political slaves — and that Albert was just made for it; he was quite spoiled, and was become a regular sap. Well, it was all as it should be. Let every man follow his own taste — he could not say this would have been his.

There was, as usual, a little temper, a little jealousy, a good deal of envy, in that speech — feelings which Imogene was grieved to observe; but even this was only a momentary vexation — she was far too well pleased herself to care much what Eugene thought upon the subject.

CHAPTER XIII.

Silence is the perfectest herald of joy:

I were but little happy if I could say how much.

MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING.

It was a pleasant cheerful party that was assembled at the Hazles.

I was there among the rest. It was now two years since I had been in this part of the country, and since I had seen Imogene.

I had been abroad with Albert, — travelling with him during nearly twelve months, and in company with the son of the statesman I have alluded to, it being in consequence of the communication thus opened, that this able and distinguished man had become acquainted with Albert's merits, and had offered him the place of private secretary.

He was young for such an appointment, but the nobleman in question possessed, among other gifts, that most valuable one in business, a clear discernment into the qualifications of men for the various offices of life, and no one better knew the right man to select for the right place. And, certainly, Albert's character, manners, and disposition, his fine talents, the habits of persevering exertion which he had acquired — added to his chivalric sense of truth and honour — fitted him admirably to discharge the important functions of the office.

The appointment had only just been made public, infinitely to the satisfaction of both his parents. Sir John chuckled and laughed, and indulged his joking propensities to a greater latitude than ever. His daughters looked higher, and thought better of themselves for what they considered a great advancement to the family, and their high spirits responded to their father's mirth.

Lady Faulconer was more quiet in the expression of her satisfaction, but it was far deeper than that of the rest. She loved her son. He might be said, except a little fondness for Laura, to be the only one of her family that inspired anything that deserved the name of love; for she was of too scheming, worldly, and calculating a nature, to be capable of much affection.

The great and secret object of her life, so carefully concealed, so long and with unremitting perseverance pursued — in spite of every discouragement — she now beheld within her grasp.

To see Albert master of Haughton Hall, and invested with the power, and occupying the place, which the possession of that already great and rapidly increasing fortune would confer — had not been so much the secret desire of her heart, as the secret determination of her will — a will, one of the strongest I ever met with in man or woman — and what will not a determined will effect?

Circumstances more favourable than she could have possibly anticipated, had aided her beyond hope in

the pursuit of her object. The very disasters of Eton, which presented at first such an unfavourable aspect, had proved in her favour.

It was not difficult for her to find out — experienced and penetrating into character as she was — from whence that influence had proceeded which had worked such a beneficial change in Albert. Nor was it hard to decipher, in the serene expression of Imogene's happy face — a something which in her most joyous moments had never been seen before. No less, by every tone and look of Albert, when the two addressed each other, did she feel assured that they understood each other, and rested, in all the confiding faith of their ingenuous years and tempers, upon their mutual constancy.

It had been Lady Faulconer's anxious care that nothing of all this should transpire — she wished, as far as possible, even to keep it a secret at present from the parties themselves. She knew Lady Emma's plans and wishes; and it was, in her opinion, most important to the ultimate success of her project — that not a suspicion of the truth should get air until the young people were a few years older, and had attained the right to claim the liberty to choose for themselves, and strength and resolution sufficient to adhere to their choice.

She, therefore, had not only encouraged Albert's desire to spend much time in travelling, but had suggested and forwarded such plans in every way — so that, during the whole of the last few years of his

education, he had only been occasionally at home — just long enough to give him the opportunities for maintaining his interest with Imogene, and so short as entirely to blind Lady Emma's eyes. If a transient apprehension had, at any time, flashed across her mind — and her security seemed so complete that even this may be doubted — it was instantly repressed by the recollection of the openly expressed wishes of Lady Faulconer, to keep her son abroad during the greater part of every vacation, and the indifference she showed to the furthering of his intimacy at Haughton.

And now, most unexpectedly, to crown the ambitious mother's plans with success, came this most honourable and gratifying appointment, at once lifting Albert into a sphere which, added to his father's estate and social position, entitled him to make pretensions to the hand of any heiress in England.

Lady Faulconer was now as impatient to bring them together, as she had been before watchful in keeping them asunder. Eugene had grown to manhood, and might prove a formidable rival. At present, it is true, he seemed careless and indifferent as to making himself an interest with Imogene, and in fact was more than half in love with her own beautiful Laura; yet she understood him as well as she did the rest, and she felt assured that at any moment the worldly ambition which was an integral part of his character might, as he advanced in worldly knowledge, spring to life, and the young man become fully aware

of the value of those things which were thrown in his way.

It was curious to sit aside, as I was at that moment doing, ensconced in a nook formed by the elbow of a book-case — half buried in one of those quaint arm-chairs with a reading-desk fixed to the arm of it, which used to be common in old houses — watching what went on.

Imogene and Eugene were announced.

She came in, looking so happy — so bright and sweet! — and as for Eugene, he was really become extremely handsome. He was not very tall, but the symmetry of his figure was perfect. His sweet, expressive, grey eye, was formed to transmit every feeling of that vehement and wayward temper — the beautiful outline and proportion of his features — set off by his abundant hair, of no definite colour — as Lamartine tells us of one who resembled him in this — which seemed ready to assume the hue of every varying feeling as it arose, sometimes glistening like the golden locks of Phœbus; at others hanging in heavy masses over his sullen darkened brow, like heaps of clouds above a scowling horizon.

It was impossible to deny that his appearance was both interesting and striking.

His temper was variable as the changes of an April sky. However, to-day it was all sunshine, and he followed Imogene, looking as well content as she did.

Lady Ulick was not in the room; Lady Faulconer

and her daughters came forward to meet them. Colours more lovely than those of the opening rose spreading over the fair face of Laura; whilst those beaming eyes of hers were bent to the earth as she held out the loveliest of hands towards Eugene. He look it, but, as I thought, with a certain negligence. Yet he whispered something in her ear which deepened the colour on her cheek, as, with a little laugh, she turned away.

Lady Faulconer loaded Imogene with the most affectionate caresses. I saw the young girl's eyes glance round the room, but he whom she sought was not there.

"He will be here to-night," the mother answered to the unexpressed thought, — and then she led her to the sofa, and kept holding her hand lovingly, as she thus proceeded — "You know, my love, we must expect to have less of him now than ever." At which Imogene's countenance fell a little. Not an expression of that treacherous face was lost upon Lady Faulconer; her own complacency was evidently much increased by what she read there, as she thus went on — "You must not be sorry — you are his friend, I know — his true, sincere, and most valued friend. We must not be sorry — it is so high a distinction — an advantage scarcely to be appreciated at his early age. He starts at once, and most advantageously, in the career — I — I say *we*, all his best friends — have coveted for him. I am gratified more than I can express — and I may proudly declare that it is the recompense of his own energy and talents."

Oh! pretty it was to see the enthusiastic spirit kindling in the young listener's face, as Lady Faulconer thus spoke.

Then a shade of anxiety came over it, and she just muttered, half in a whisper —

“Then, perhaps, he will not be able to come down this evening at all.”

Lady Faulconer repressed a smile.

“Oh, yes, he will come — I am sure he will do the impossible; but he will come to this ball, dearest Imogene. No power on earth, I am convinced, sweetest Imogene, could keep him away: not links of iron could bind him. It is not improbable that he may still be in time for dinner.”

Before we separated to dress, Imogene had found me out, and I had received a cordial welcome, yet with a shade of shyness, which reminded me — “*Que je n'étais pas la rose, mais que j'avais vécu auprès d'elle.*”

We all assembled in the drawing-room, except the three young ladies, who had not yet appeared, and were chatting, for the quarter of an hour before dinner, in a rather distant window. Albert had not arrived. Sir John and Lord Ulick, and other gentlemen of Sir John's standing, were discussing the last day's run, where Lord Ulick, seaman as he was, had distinguished himself by his fearless riding. There was a pleasant, cheerful hum of conversation to be heard,

in which I, as usual, did not take much part, being engaged in my old favourite occupation of observing. Eugene did not say much more than I did; he kept leaning against the side of the window, his eyes fixed upon the door.

It opened at last, and the three young ladies entered. Charlotte came in first, according to the precedence due to her rank — a precedence she always took care to claim, but more especially when Imogene was present. Imogene and Laura followed, arm in arm.

There might be a difficulty in deciding which looked the most charmingly, though Laura was, unquestionably, the most regularly handsome. She was dressed too, to-day — as if in contradiction of Eugene's remarks — without any of that regard to economy with which he had reproached Lady Faulconer. She wore a dress of tender pink, and as evidently the handiwork of a first-rate artist as that of Imogene's herself could be, though somewhat less rich and expensive in its materials.

Lady Faulconer understood the tactics of society far too well to make a vain attempt to contend, in matters of expense, with the wealthy heiress of Haughton; but the prize for superior taste and elegance lay open to her. The making Laura's appearance upon this day most peculiarly attractive and distinguished, was as important a feature in the carrying out of her plans as any other upon that eventful evening.

There was a sort of start of admiration among the

young men grouped at the window — a start of mingled surprise and pleasure at the entrance of these two sweet young creatures — and a general rush forward to greet — or I might say, without exaggeration, almost to do homage to them.

Eugene alone kept his place — watching the two with what seemed rather a critical than the adoring eye, such as at that moment I thought they deserved. He seemed to be instituting a sort of comparison between the two. His eye turned from one to the other: it finally rested upon Imogene.

She was acknowledging, with an air of unaffected sweetness and modesty, the salutations and compliments of the more elderly and important personages of the party — that is, of the heads of families, and their lady wives — being received by all with a respect and distinction which plainly showed the high place that the heiress of Haughton was considered to hold in the county. Her possessions, indeed, were so large, that all distinctions, but those of very elevated rank, sank into insignificance before them. She had been accustomed from her infancy, through the judicious interference of Mr. Glenroy, to be treated as became her position, and she now received the attention of all around with that simplicity, the result of habit. There was neither shyness nor stiffness about her, far less the slightest approach to assumption or ill-bred condescension. Her grace and gentleness won every heart.

And as this went on, Eugene's eyes, I observed, became riveted upon her, watching her with fixed at-

tention. I know not whether I read his feelings aright, but it appeared to me that he was, like the rest, filled with admiration, and a certain astonishment at himself that he had not understood all this before. I thought I had reason, also, to remark the existence of a new feeling of satisfaction, which, when he reflected upon the place he seemed called upon to occupy in relation to the heiress, was gradually succeeding to his ancient captiousness and jealousy. He smiled with pleasure at the recollection that he was engaged to her for the first dance.

I saw Laura, from a seat on a sofa, which she had taken, and where a chair close by stood unoccupied, casting many a wistful glance towards the window — but he never once turned his eyes her way. I saw hers follow the direction of his, and the ruby of her lip turn pale.

I had no patience with him. I am good-natured, soft-hearted fool — always must be putting in where I fancy people are uncomfortable.

I went and sat down in the chair left unoccupied — I wanted to find something to say that would cheer her.

“How lovely that head-dress of yours is,” I began — “It is the most becoming thing in the world. What do you call these flowers? Forget-me-nots?”

I was rewarded for my good intentions by a look of impatience, as if she thought me the greatest bore in the world to occupy that place — for just then Eugene began to move.

I rose instantly, but it was too late. He passed

on to the group round Imogene. I could only hope Laura believed it was owing to my own ill-management in occupying the chair just at that moment, and not to his indifference that it was not taken by him. Be that as it may, she looked more cross than sorry just then.

I was *bête* enough to rejoice she could indulge in her self-deception.

When we were called to dinner, I took care to be a little out of the way.

Lady Ulick committed Laura to Eugene, but his face slightly contracted, as a face does when a qualm of disgust passes over a man.

Did he begin to suspect a scheme in this? Was that the reason?

I was ordered to take out Imogene.

She laid her hand in her pleasant, confiding way, upon my arm — as if I had been an old uncle of seventy; saying gaily, as she did so — “Oh, I *am* so glad!” — and began to chat, before we had even reached the dining-room. She was in the gayest spirits — I had never seen her in gayer. She was infinitely charming. Her hidden love it was, as is mostly the case with every honest heart, which gave the zest to all the distinctions she had been receiving. She prized this general expression of good opinion for Albert’s sake. She hoarded it for Albert, and, I believe, she was not sorry that Albert’s friend was present to witness it.

We were favourably placed at dinner.

Between her and the lady who sat in the seat of honour by Lord Ulick, there was a jolly country gentleman, whose talk was of "runts," or rather of game, and especially foxes; and the trio were soon in high discussion upon those never-ending subjects. They spoke loud, and the noise they made drowned the sweet flow of that pretty, prattling voice — flowing, like some clear purling brook, over shining pebbles — forgive the comparison, but I never heard sweet Moggie speak — for there was a something of the Moggie left in her still — and chattering away in the pretty manner she did when she was in spirits, without thinking of it.

Of course we talked of my late travels. Of course she was interested in every adventure and detail; and, of course — do me the justice to believe that — I did not make the philosopher Lenham the hero of the story. How merrily she laughed when I related Albert's adventures! — his little scrapes, and his little disasters. How gaily she smiled and questioned, and laughed again — and the sweet gravity which came over her face when I threw in an incident or two which gave evidence of higher merits than those of mere enterprise and insatiable love of adventure. How the colour rose, and the pretty eye twinkled — and, in a very suspicious way, upon one or two occasions (once, I am certain), I caught the delicate finger brushing something away from it.

Eugene sat opposite to us, at the side of Laura. At first he talked to her, but in a careless manner, as

mere common civility required; but she, poor girl, as usual, interpreting his attention according to her wishes, was evidently more than satisfied. She looked beautiful; and once or twice he gazed with admiration — but, by and by, his eye was attracted to our side of the table. He seemed watching us, and soon began to look displeased and out of sorts. I almost believe he was doing me the honour to be jealous of *me*! But I was, much as I liked her, fancy free — invulnerable — for I considered her as belonging to my friend. As for Imogene, she never once turned her eyes his way — but chatted on, absorbed in one subject, and felt not the influences of that evil eye which lowered upon us.

“But I dare say he will not come after all — Lady Faulconer said he would probably be here at dinner.”

I did not in the least expect him to dinner — I told her so, but added, “I am certain he will be at the ball to-night. You know he promised his aunt Ulick, and he will keep his promise, — even if there were no other reason why he is certain to come.”

She coloured; and there was such a pretty little conscious laugh.

Eugene, I saw, was beginning to look daggers at me — I was quite afraid she would observe it, and that it would disturb her. I was glad when the sign was made for the ladies to withdraw. I saw Imogene attempt to take Laura's arm as they left the room; but Laura turned away rather rudely. Imogene only

put up her pretty lips a little, and left her to herself. She was used to slight caprices of temper upon the part of her young friend, and had learned that the best way was not to care; to let the little breeze blow over, as such breezes, when left to themselves, usually do.

Humming a tune in a low voice, she made her escape into a moderately-sized conservatory, into which the dining-room opened; and amused herself with examining the plants, and admiring flowers and ferns, but her thoughts were wandering far away among the orange groves of the East, which I had been describing to her.

Country balls are early affairs, especially when you have to go some five miles to attend them. We had coffee, and were assembled in the hall, ready for starting, before nine o'clock.

It was proposed that there should be a mingling of parties. Eugene was offered a place in Lady Ulick's carriage; and I, with a certain Mrs. Hewit — wife of a small gentleman in the neighbourhood, who had no carriage, only a fly, and whom Imogene, upon that account, I believe, had asked to be so good-natured as to chaperon her — it was arranged, was to go in the Haughton carriage; but Eugene broke through this arrangement, in his usual decisive manner, somewhat roughly saying, that he chose to go as he came.

Therefore Imogene had Mrs. Hewit's company to herself, and literally to herself, I believe; for once

installed in the carriage, Eugene threw himself back in the corner, never once spoke, and slept, or pretended to sleep, during the entire drive. Mrs. Hewit meanwhile enlightened Miss Aubrey in the mysteries of rearing Guinea-fowls and Pea-chicks, which, for some reason or other, they had not succeeded well in doing at Haughton.

And oh! what a bore she thought Mrs. Hewit — did she not?

Not in the least — She evidently took quite an interest in the talk — Eugene despised her for it in his proud heart — gossiping about the poultry-yard with that commonplace Mrs. Hewit, as if it was the most interesting subject in the world.

But Imogene was like Burke — universal. She managed to extract something worth listening to from every one, because she was thoroughly good-natured as well as thoroughly well-bred. Her desire to give pleasure made her instinctively select the subjects that were most formed to please those with whom she conversed, being of course such as they best understood; and her gentle facility, and exemption from the slightest shadow of implied superiority, or condescension, set every one at ease. Mrs. Hewit was quite in love with her before she got out of the carriage, and declared afterwards she never had had a more delightful drive than with that charming girl; and Imogene learned how to manage her Pea-chicks, about which she was much interested; and I sincerely hope had, as she deserved, her reward in rearing flocks of the

beautiful creatures such as once peopled the woods of magnificent Stow.

Eugene had not recovered his ill-humour when he handed her out of the carriage, and they together entered the crowded passage of the inn where the assembly rooms were.

"What can make you look such a knight of the sour — rather than doleful countenance?" she asked, merrily.

"How can you, Imogene? — How could you keep chattering on with that tiresome old woman — I declare you lay out for popularity on all sides, till it makes one sick."

She laughed.

"Don't be cross! If I lay out for popularity, I have to do it for two, I am sure; you may stand, some day or other, for the county."

"Nonsense! — You only do it because your desire of pleasing is insatiable."

"Pleasing myself, do you mean? — for I *was* pleasing myself."

"There is something low — inherently low-bred — I mean in the sense of family descent," he said, with haughty disgust, "in this taste for inferior company. I declare, Imogene, if it were not that I know the Aubreys are good blood, I should think there was almost a bar in your escutcheon. It's not like other people. You don't do it as a matter of proper condescension, and show that you mean it so, by always

taking care to maintain your proper place. You actually seem as if you liked it — as if it came natural to you — as if you were one of them.”

“And so I am — and so I try to seem when I am with them. Condescension! I should be ashamed to think of such a thing. Nonsense, Eugene! The difference is less than you think. It depends mostly upon what people’s daily business is. Yours may be in the stars, like a sublime poet as you are — but mine is about dirty floors and well-dusted corners, and good little boys and girls, and all sorts of household matters; and therefore I am no better — and I hold myself no better — than any of the rest who can talk sense, and who understand their own business. What a silly, silly, conceited boy you are yet, Eugene! I thought you were more of a man! — I am quite ashamed of you!”

Looking up in his face as she said this, with such a loving yet wicked smile, that one should have thought the very demon himself would have stood rebuked, and found it irresistible. Not he — he looked sulky still.

CHAPTER XIV.

Love's message travell'd by the nerves and eye,
In current deep and still;
As harp strings answer to the zephyr's sigh.

MRS. ACTON TINDAL.

THE Assembly Room, as it was there called, was rather a handsome apartment, which, through the exertions of the town and neighbourhood, had been added to the somewhat obscure and old mansion which claimed to be the principal inn of the place.

Through a low, narrow, gloomy passage, now crowded with bustling people, they made their way as well as they could to the cloaking-room, and thence to the ball-room.

There was a great air of business and much hurry and confusion throughout the house. Waiters scouring about, summoned here and called to there, and vainly answering with the "Anon, anon, Sir," of poor Francis the Drawer. Carriages were rapidly succeeding each other, driving up and setting down; young men to be seen hastily entering and running up the old shaking stairs to their dressing-rooms. Young ladies anxious about "the wheel" blocking up the way, whilst they paused to examine whether their dresses had escaped uninjured; too intent upon the interesting inquiry to notice how the delay might inconvenience others. Impatient old gentlemen hurrying their wives and daughters, with sundry small oaths, along. Mammams anxiously shielding their flocks from injury to their

trimmings by the crush in the passage. In short, it was the usual display of that individual selfishness of a crowd, where every one has to take care of himself, and, in the old phrase, look after Number One.

Imogene hurried along upon the impatient arm of Eugene, followed fast in the wake of Lady Faulconer, the young gentleman pushing forwards with that utter indifference to the comfort or convenience of others, which distinguished him even in this bustling assemblage; she, squeezing herself into the smallest possible compass, that she might incommode no one more than she could possibly help.

She, however, was not so taken up with this consideration for others as to forget her own little concerns any more than other people did; and many were the looks she cast around, and especially wherever a handsome brown head was to be seen above the others, or a fashionable young man in a travelling dress pushed by.

All in vain — the face she so longed to see appeared not.

After due preparation, and those little repairs which young ladies, be their maids never so accomplished, always seem to need in the cloaking rooms; sundry little impatient exclamations of Laura's, and repetitions of "Will you never be ready?" from Lady Ulick, the party, a very brilliant one, in appearance at least, entered the Assembly Room, and followed Lady Ulick and Lady Faulconer to the places of dignity at the top.

A galaxy they seemed of splendidly attired mammas, and of lovely and elegantly dressed girls, escorted by a set of — for the country — very tolerable-looking young men. Among the seniors, Sir John Faulconer bore away the bell. As for Eugene, he appeared among the really good-looking youths around him like “a dove trooping with crows.” He seemed thoroughly aware of his advantages. He was wonderfully “come on” during the eighteen months since I had seen him — and whatever it might proceed from, whether innate taste and elegance, or increased contact with the world, was as distinguished a looking young fellow as any one could wish to see.

Poor Imogene — Her bright eyes no longer bright; the smile of her pretty mouth exchanged for a somewhat doleful expression — kept looking incessantly at the door, as fresh group succeeded to group.

But he whom she sought came not.

At last, pretty innocent thing, she turned her asking eyes to me.

As if I were answerable for him.

I stood near her — stooped down — and answered by —

“Depend upon it, he will come.”

There seemed but one *he* between her and myself.

She brightened up at the renewed assurance, and gave her hand cheerfully to Eugene, who came to claim her for the first quadrille.

It was really a very pretty quadrille; and, as I stood looking at it, and listening to the spirit-stirring

strains of the somewhat noisy band, I began to think that there was nothing upon this earth much better worth seeing than a good ball.

Remember, I was scarcely more than a youth myself.

I took much pleasure in watching Eugene and his partner, they both danced so gracefully; and having, of course, been accustomed to dance together, fell into each other's mode with a harmony of motion which was really beautiful. It reminded one of Perdita's dancing — "Like a wave of the sea!"

But those eyes — those wandering eyes — at every pause still sought the doorway in vain.

At last, just as she finished one of the figures, and turned to her place, she caught a face appearing opposite to her, above the crowd which was assembled round the dancers — and did she not colour high, all the hues of the fairest roses, whilst one bright gleam flashed from that eye, which instantly sank beneath his?

The next moment she had raised it again, as if to assure herself that it was really he — but he was no longer there.

But he had only disappeared for a moment, making his way round behind the crowd towards her; and whilst she stood waiting, as her cavalier was performing his share of the figure, a voice, to her like Heaven's own music, murmured soft and low in her ear: —

"And how is Imogene?"

She looked up, and she looked down, whilst her hand slid shyly into his, which was held out to seize

it. Oh! if you had but seen her face! — I may say his face too.

That fine, manly, high-spirited countenance, is full of tenderness and inexpressible joy.

But the dance again summoned her — he drew a few paces back, and she floated on.

Floated! For was it not beautiful? Such indescribable softness in every motion — such tender, almost divine felicity, beaming from that sweet countenance.

He gazed, I could see, like one enraptured and almost drunk with happiness: and well he might — who could have resisted that sweet expression of innocent joy?

When she came to her place again —

“You are not engaged for the next dances?”

“Oh, no!”

“You dance with me.”

A sweet look, which said as plainly as look could say it, “To be sure I do!”

The dance was over; Eugene led his partner to her seat; Albert walked upon the other side. Having seated her, Eugene took himself away, in search of other amusement, and Albert dropped into the vacant place beside Imogene.

And then! oh, then! were not the barriers of reserve unloosed, and did not the current of felicity flow!

So much to be told! — so much to be asked! — She so blushingly happy, and he looking down upon her bending head with that ineffable expression of manly tenderness which makes the countenance of a

man who is thoroughly and rightly attached, in my opinion, the most interesting spectacle in nature.

They were soon summoned, by the sound of the waltz, to join the dancers; and away they flew, almost dizzy with felicity.

Next they danced a quadrille together — and afterwards they sat down once more; and it was not until then that Albert, summoning courage, began —

“You expected me to-night — you felt certain that I *must* come.”

“I hoped, and yet I feared... I began to think you never would arrive, when, just then, I spied you out.”

“I would have come,” he said, vehemently, “though the earth itself had opened and yawned between, to separate us.”

She looked down and smiled softly.

“Perhaps,” he said, “you may guess why I would have come — why I *must* have come. I feel shy — I feel afraid — and yet you will not, *you* will not think me presumptuous, Imogene! Others may — you will understand me.

She spoke not, but her hand began to tremble a little.

“May I? Yes I may — yes I will. Were these flowers,” — and he drew a little bunch of withered Forget-me-nots from his bosom — “were these flowers — what I believed them then to be — a silent pledge, that if I did as you bade me — and I have tried with all my soul’s strength to do it — that the time would come when I might... ask you to be mine, Imogene?”

She could not speak — her heart throbbed so fast.

It was said — It was said. Now they were one. She knew it was to be — she had considered herself engaged to him all along; but now the barrier between them was thrown down — It was no longer a hope, it was a fact!

She was his for ever.

One glance flashed up in answer to his appeal, and then the little hand stole towards his, took the forget-me-nots, and kissed them.

It was the seal of their betrothment.

She was engaged to dance the two next dances with me. It was a quadrille, for that was the extent of my accomplishments in this line; but you could scarcely believe it was the same creature before you. She scarcely seemed to know what she was about; and she was so absent, and danced so carelessly, that Laura and Eugene, who were her *vis à vis*, exclaimed and scolded. Eugene, with his usual peremptory way of speaking, aroused her. She looked up, as though she was suddenly awakened from a dream, and scarcely understood what he said.

"What are you about, Imogene? Do please to mind. What *can* you be thinking of?"

"I'll try to do better," she answered, looking confused, and as if endeavouring to recollect herself.

"Oh, I am so glad it is over!" she cried, as, hanging upon my arm, I was taking her to her seat.

"Thank you," I said, laughing, "it must be a great bore, of course, to dance with me."

She answered with such a tell-tale smile.

The rest of that evening of felicity was passed in a sort of dream. "When the Lord turned the captivity of Zion we were like them that dream." — Blessed ought they to esteem themselves who even *once*, in the course of the longest life, have experienced the full meaning of that sentence.

The order of our return was a little altered from that of our coming. Lady Faulconer contrived that herself, her son, and Imogene, should return alone in the Drystoke carriage.

I believe she was aware with what intentions Albert had come down, but she made no allusion to what had passed; a glance exchanged with her son had satisfied her that he had sped. She only betrayed her satisfaction by a still more than ordinary tenderness in her manner to Imogene, and a something there was, unlike her usual self — but which filled Imogene's heart with affectionate pleasure.

Those who truly love, extend their love to every one connected with the beloved one. Albert's mother became dear to her almost as her own; his father and his sisters were beloved because they were his. Every person and thing in which he had a part, even my unworthy self included, came in for a share of her overflowing affection.

The next day Imogene was to return home. Eugene had at first intended to accompany her; but a

great coursing match — there were still coursing matches in this remote county — was to come off that day; partly, I believe, a device of Lord Ulick's, to keep his company together; partly of Lady Faulconer's to detain Eugene.

Several other plans were devised for the general amusement, and Eugene seemed well-inclined to accept the invitations pressed upon him.

They wanted to keep Imogene; but she pleaded that her mother was alone, and she could not leave her longer.

She was, indeed, most impatient to return home, to relate what had passed, and receive those congratulations so dear to the heart, which a young girl looks for from her mother, when, hiding her face in her bosom, she tells the sweet tale, and confesses she is happy.

She would not let Albert accompany her, under the circumstances. A sense of propriety rendered that impossible; and, besides, she really wished to see her mother alone, to have those first sacred moments of confidence all to herself, for she loved her mother dearly, and had long felt secure of that return of warm affection, which, in earlier and less happy years, she had so coveted. It was agreed between the two, then, that Imogene should be the bearer of a note from Albert; and that he should follow in the evening, and arrive at the early tea, substituted for the late dinner, when Imogene and her mother were alone.

And so they parted.

He put her into the carriage — Eugene let him

have it his own way. He and Imogene were so much like brother and sister that he was in the habit of ceding these little privileges to others, as is the manner of properly-behaved brothers. I fancied I saw him casting one or two somewhat sinister looks at Albert in the course of the morning, whilst we were dawdling about, waiting for the various equipages to come up and carry off departing guests — that of Imogene being the last; but he suffered himself to be a good deal engrossed with Laura, who indeed looked splendidly handsome, flushed as she was with hope and happiness.

Hope and happiness, as it grieved me to believe, which had its principal source in the credulity of wishing; for Eugene's manner was still very equivocal, and would have been very unsatisfactory to one more accustomed to the self-discipline of schooling her imagination than poor Laura Faulconer.

"Good bye, dear," was Eugene's farewell. "Tell your mother not to expect me — I shall probably not be home for a week or so — they seem quite jolly out here."

The Haughton Hall carriage drove up — Albert having placed Imogene in it, the door was shut; he stopped, and, leaning against the panel, whispered a few more last words, as she bent her head to the window — then turned abruptly away, as the carriage disappeared down the walk which led to the shrubberies, and we saw him no more that day.

He did not join the coursing match — and when the party assembled to a late dinner, we were told that Albert Faulconer was gone.

CHAPTER XV.

And our hearts, though stout and brave,
Still, like muffled drums, are beating
Funeral marches to the grave.

LONGFELLOW.

IMOGENE ran lightly up to her mother's dressing-room. She knew she should find her there. It was an apartment which Lady Emma always occupied when slightly indisposed. It had a whole history of love and sorrow attached, and in it she took a melancholy pleasure.

The young and happy creature opened the door. Her mother was lying upon the sofa, as usual, and was gazing thoughtfully — her still beautiful face rendered more lovely, by the tender sadness of the expression — upon the wide-spreading prospect outside.

"My children!" turning round; "Dear ones! You are good to come so early — but where is Eugene?"

"There was a coursing match, and they persuaded him to stay."

"And why did not you stay? How is he to get back?"

"I did not want to stay — I wanted to come here to you, Mamma; besides it is uncertain, he bade me say, when he should come home; there are gay doings going on out there. He will write when I am to send the dog-cart for him."

"Well, my darling, as you *are* come, I will own

I am very glad to have you. One gets old and sadly dependent upon the love of others, my Moggie."

"Oh, Mamma, and little Moggie is so glad when her mimmie wishes for her," said she, planting herself on her old low seat, the footstool, and caressingly creeping up close to her mother.

"Dear thing," said Lady Emma, affectionately; then lifting up the face which was already burying itself in the folds of her mother's dress — "Let me look at you. You don't look quite — quite the child I sent away. What is it, love? Surely" . . . with an expression of hope and expectation breaking like golden sun-beams from behind a heavy-clouded sky — "Can anything have happened very particular — very interesting? No, no; he is so young. And yet not, perhaps, too young. Speak, my Imogene!"

"Oh, Mamma! Mamma! Have you — can you have guessed?"

"Yes, my pretty one, I do begin to guess. Well, well — hide your face if you like; but just tell me — just whisper me that my Imogene is happy."

"The angels in heaven are not happier," in a low voice.

Lady Emma stooped down and kissed the shining hair, for the face was still buried in the white folds of her garment — whilst Imogene, overpowered by this tenderness of sympathy, shed a few silent, grateful tears.

Then her hand, which held a small folded paper, stole gently up, and placed it in her mother's.

Lady Emma opened it, but, without looking at the superscription, uttered a loud shriek — and dashing from the sofa, sprang to the floor, and stood there with the aspect of a fury, holding the letter above her head in her clenched hand.

“Mother! — Mother!” cried Imogene, springing up in her turn; and throwing herself upon her knees before her, she clasped her in her arms. “Mamma! — Mamma!”

But Lady Emma thrust her away.

“Treachery! You have deceived me!” — she cried.

The poor girl remained on her knees, trembling violently, between terror and amazement; unable to speak, and utterly unconscious of the cause for this desperate outburst of passion. She began to think her mother was suddenly gone mad, as, tearing the letter into a thousand atoms, she flung them desperately away — and throwing herself once more upon the sofa, again buried her face in the cushions, and rather shrieked than groaned.

Imogene remained shivering and trembling where she was — so horror-struck and astounded that she actually could not move. At last her mother started up from the cushion, and, half raising herself, with a face filled with rage and despair, cried out in a terrible voice: —

“Wretched girl! What have you been doing?”

The sound of her mother's voice restored Imogene to her senses. She turned towards her, and, still upon her knees, said —

"Mother! What have I done?"

"Done! — done! — You have killed me."

And then her inflamed and heated countenance changed to such a ghastly paleness, that Imogene, terrified almost out of her senses, flew for water, and, throwing her arm round her mother, attempted to convey the glass to her lips.

Her mother shook her off.

"It's of no use — it's all over!" — she faintly muttered between her teeth.

Imogene was bewildered with terror. She felt certain that her mother had been seized with a sudden paroxysm of delirium, and began to think of calling for help.

"You are very ill, Mamma," she said soothingly — "let me ring! We must have advice directly."

"Stop!" cried Lady Emma, authoritatively laying her hand upon her arm — "Don't ring — I am not *ill*. Oh, no — no — no!" — she ran on wildly, "I am not *ill*!" — and then she burst into a flood of tears.

It was a relief to see her weep, even though so violently, and large tears of sympathy ran down the hapless girl's cheeks.

Lady Emma looked up at her. She could not misinterpret that countenance of honest pity and bewilderment.

"I was unjust," she said, with her usual prompt candour, after she had been impatient and wrong. "I said treachery — Imogene, you are incapable of

treachery. But, oh! — woe! woe! woe! — wretched! wretched! wretched child! — woe! woe! upon us all.”

“Dear mother — let me ... Pray — pray —” endeavouring once more to throw her arms round her — “Pray, pray, compose yourself — tell me what is the matter — there must be some reason — some strange reason for all this.”

“Oh, yes! — reason! reason enough!” cried her mother, woefully shaking her head.

“May I know it, Mamma? — May I share it? I am not a child now,” said Imogene gently, kneeling down again by her mother’s side, and laying her cheek to hers.

Lady Emma did not repulse her this time. Better feelings were taking place of the first rage of disappointment; she began to feel for Imogene herself, at last.

“Know? — Imogene! — Know? — Yes, you *must* know. Child! child! — You don’t love Albert Falconer very — very much, I hope.”

“For life and death,” was the answer, with something of a religious solemnity.

She had long considered herself as his wife; she had looked upon the engagement between them as sacred and irrevocable.

“But it must not be — It cannot be — Do you know *that*, poor child! Oh, Imogene! Don’t turn so pale — and, above all, don’t look so resolved,” she said, shrinking back, as if in terror.

“Mother — forgive me — in everything else —

But here, it is as if the Almighty himself had bound us together."

"Oh, blaspheme not his holy, holy name! child of deceit — which God abhors! offspring of falsehood — which God curses! How can his blessing light on you?"

"I am the child," said Imogene, lifting up her head gravely, "neither of deceit nor falsehood. No deceit have I intentionally used; and those from whom I spring were truth itself. Mother, you are truth itself — I have always thought so of my father. I never tried — I never intended to hide this thing from you. I did not know whether it would come to anything. I knew, indeed, my own heart, but I did not think myself bound to tell that secret to any one. Why should I? I knew Albert would go out into the world. I knew the value of a boy's fancy. I determined quietly to wait till he had time to see, and opportunity to choose. I had not the least suspicion it was wrong, but I thought it a sort of duty not to give words — not to give a body of words to my affection till I knew whether it would be returned as I wished — as I ought to wish it to be. There was something in me — something I could not resist — which made me hide my feelings till that time came. Indeed, indeed, Mamma, it was not deceit! but a sort of shame. You know, Mamma, one cannot help it — it is our nature; so don't be angry, Mamma, pray — don't be offended. Did I not come to you as soon as I could, and tell you all? And has he not written in the humblest terms to

beg your consent? But ah! you have torn his letter all to bits."

"I see, I see," sobbed Lady Emma.

"Then, Mamma, dear Mamma," again taking her hand, and looking imploringly into her face, "say you are not angry with us — say you are not angry with *him*. Indeed he did not mean to offend you. He would have done anything rather than displease you; and so would I."

Lady Emma had risen up, and sat burying her face in her handkerchief. She was weeping bitterly, — but, at these words, she lowered the handkerchief from her face, and, with a piteous expression, looked into her daughter's pleading eyes.

The darkness of her own; the deep mysterious darkness as of death — terrified the young girl again.

"Mamma," she said, "there is something — there is something — I don't know."

"Yes, my child," grasping the hand which lay upon her knee, and holding it there with a convulsive force like a vice, "there is — there is — something dreadful! something horrible! which, poor child! you don't — don't know."

"Let me know it, then," said Imogene, with resolution.

"You must — You shall!" she answered solemnly. Then, as she was about to begin her explanation, she burst forth into a fresh agony of tears, and fell back crying, "Oh, that this task should be mine! That

the burden should be laid upon me! It will kill her! it will kill her! — And, after all, she *is* my own child.”

Then, recovering herself, she sat upright again, and laying hold of both Imogene’s hands as she knelt before her, held them there — and, looking upon her again with an expression not to be described, she began —

“Child! You believe in God.”

Imogene reverently bent her head.

That she did, and served Him from the depth of her heart, and with all the strength of her young, generous will.

“Can you? Have you — done *that*, which at your age I had not done — endeavoured to obey Him from your childhood in simplicity and truth? Have you done this?”

“I have tried” — in a faltering voice.

“Then — turn to Him now.”

And did she not?

She felt something dreadful was at hand. She lifted up her good and innocent heart. Come what would, she had a rock on which to rest.

“You are a good, dear child,” — Lady Emma went on — “So good, I have wondered at and envied you.”

“And loved me, Mamma, a little,” she whispered plaintively —

“And learned at last to love you, dear, good girl, as my own soul” — said her mother, fervently.

Then she was silent, as if confused and abstracted. She had forgotten what she was going to say.

"But, Mamma, you have not told me" — said Imogene, gently.

"Aye, true!" — like one returning nervously to a dreaded task.

"Told you! — what was it? — what was I to do?" Her eyes wandered strangely.

"Why, Albert and I" . . . ?

The name recalled her at once to herself.

"Oh, yes — yes — yes — I know!" — She shook her head, as if to chase the dizziness and confusion that was coming over her, and, looking again firmly into her daughter's eyes, said — "You wish to marry Albert Faulconer, I think."

"I do, mother!" in a low voice, colouring.

"And you believe," Lady Emma went on, becoming more and more excited as she spoke, "that you are the heiress of Haughton Hall, and you are proud to carry this rich inheritance to the man you love? — You are mistaken. — You *may* be the possessor, but you are not the heiress, of Haughton."

Imogene looked as if waiting for explanation.

"The law — human law! — which deals in externals, and knows nothing of their hidden realities — may have awarded you this estate — but before the tribunal of conscience! — In His eyes, who is himself truth — who sees into the hidden secrets of things, and is not to be mocked by vain appearances — you

have no more right to this estate than the most miserable beggar that ever crawled to you for alms."

"Mamma, you are very ill!" — cried Imogene, excessively terrified, and endeavouring to rise, as if to get assistance; but her mother held her down.

"No, I am not ill! — I am not mad! — though well may I seem so to you, for the tale I have to tell passes the wildest dreams of frenzy. Ah! my child, my child!" — again melting into tears — "That I should have to tell this tale to you — my dear, good child."

The terrors of Imogene now began to take a new form — some awful revelation seemed to be really approaching. She felt very sick, and could only give a sign to her mother, imploring her to proceed.

"My Imogene, it is the law of our human condition. The child must bear the iniquity of the father — the innocent suffer for the guilty. The bleeding lamb on Abel's first altar was a type . . . The grand sacrifice — which was the grand victory — all tell us the same thing."

"*I shall not have to suffer so for my father*" — was all that Imogene said.

Her mother did not seem to hear her — she went on: —

"There has been an awful crime committed; and it was followed by a second crime. Two acts of black domestic treason — such as the Father of all the families upon earth abhors — and you," looking steadily at her, "will be the atoning victim."

And at once, as if melted to the heart by the thought of her daughter's fate, she threw her arms round her, fell upon her neck, and wept bitterly.

Nothing could have softened the anguish of the present moment to the terrified and astonished girl, like this honest emotion upon the part of her mother. She pressed her tenderly to her bosom, whispering — "Dear, dear Mamma!"

These passionate bursts of tears relieved Lady Emma, and, it is probable, preserved her senses. She recovered herself again, and went on: —

"Prepare yourself with all that courage with which you have been endowed — arm yourself for the great task which lies before you — the offering up an enormous sacrifice to right and justice."

"Tell me what it is — and Heaven give me grace to do His holy will."

"There has been a great crime committed — two crimes — and you at this moment profit by them. The wrong that has been done, they tell me, clings to you; like that poisoned robe the wicked woman presented, the gift of a more wicked being still — it sticks to you — you cannot, so they tell me, tear it off. You have been from your childhood — you must go on still — enjoying the fruits of another's deceit, and withholding from him to whom it is justly due, those possessions which are no more rightfully yours — I repeat it — than the veriest beggar's that ever crawled to your gate."

Paler and paler Imogene grew; but she spoke not: she continued to listen.

"One way, and one only way, remains to do what is righteous and just, and restore to the rightful owner that of which he has been so wrongfully deprived."

"Tell me what it is, and I will do it."

"You will! you will! Oh! bless you for that word! But will you, indeed? Dear girl, will you?"

"Whatever is right I will do."

"There is but one way — one only way remaining — to redeem the past, and restore the right heir to his place. Listen, Imogene, not one drop of the blood of Aubrey flows in your veins; but the true heir — the doubly wronged — the twice defrauded — lives, and the property must be restored to him."

"And so it shall! Prove what you say, and as readily will I throw off all these trappings that envelop me, as the dust of my mortal vesture when summoned from the grave."

"Aye but —"

"Does Mr. Glenroy know all this?" Imogene went on. "Make me understand . . . If not an Aubrey, what am I, then? What are you?"

"I am William Craven, the gamekeeper's, son's wife; and you are his child."

"How?"

"You remember Alice Craven."

"To be sure — I do."

"She was your father's mother."

She then went on, with as much composure as she

could command, to detail the events which had happened. Imogene listened with profound attention. Her face was perfectly colourless; her eyes, serious and calm, were fixed upon her mother's face. Now and then she slightly shuddered. Now and then a trembling, like that of a sudden gust of wind passing among the forest trees, passed over her limbs.

Lady Emma at length came to the second part of her narrative, and began, with a hesitating voice and crimsoning cheek, to enter upon that most terrible subject; impelled by a strong — a Spartan sense of duty.

But here Imogene stopped her.

"Pray do not tell me anything painful about papa. I think I understand, that, for some reason or other, you think, that even if he had been Mr. Aubrey's son, Haughton ought not to be mine; that is enough — I can bear the rest . . . but I don't know how I could bear hearing anything against papa."

And saying this she quietly folded her head up in a large shawl that happened to be lying near, and resting it against the arm of the sofa, sat perfectly still for some time.

Her mother respected her silence, and, exhausted by the effort she had made, leaned back and quietly waited for Imogene to speak next.

Suddenly she started up, threw the shawl from her head, and seemed about to quit the room.

"Where are you going, my dear?"

"I have a letter to write — there is no time to lose."

"You will come back again to me."

"Yes, Mamma."

She had suddenly recollected that Albert was to be at Haughton this very evening. To meet him in the present utter confusion of her ideas, and before she had been able so far to collect herself as even to understand her situation, was impossible. To-morrow she would see him; but he should be spared the shock of this unexpected reverse to-night. He should not be struck down by a thunder-bolt as she had been. She would prepare him, and she would see him to-morrow. Yes, come what would of it, one resolution she was able to form — she would see Albert again, and she would see him to-morrow.

She wrote a few hasty lines, to prepare him in some degree for disappointment and sorrow; begging him to be with her between twelve and one o'clock the next day, and, in the meantime, to give no hint of the contents of her note to any one. She took it to Nurse, and begged her to go herself to the stables, and despatch a groom with orders to carry it by the lower road to the Hazles, and if he met Mr. Faulconer by the way, to give it to him.

This little exertion somewhat relieved her; but when it was over, she seemed first thoroughly to awaken to a sense of what had happened. To the mind it is as to the body: we are not at the first moment sensible to the full pain of a tremendous blow.

As she slowly returned to her mother's room, her perceptions returned, and with them came the bewildering sense of a fall — of an overthrow — a stupifying, unintelligible catastrophe and change. She was — and she was no longer herself.

Who was she? — What was she?

But soon the impatience to know more revived; she as yet knew nothing definite of the change in her own position. She was no longer the heiress of the Aubreys. She was a portionless dependent — the child of a dependent — that was all she as yet had understood. Some obscure hints; something more to be told of that Edward, there was — She must know all.

She entered her mother's room with a certain impatience.

Her mother looked up, and motioned her to her place upon that low seat at her knee again.

"And now, Mamma," said Imogene — "there is more to tell me. Is the person that is wronged still living?"

"You have heard Edward Aubrey's name mentioned, Imogene. Of course, he must be the person to whom this estate rightfully belongs."

"But he is dead."

"I know not — But this I know — he has left a son."

A flush of joy brightened her face, as, clasping her hands, she said —

"Then, restitution may yet be made."

Her mother sighed.

"Yes, restitution *may* yet be made. To effect it I have agonized, prayed, and laboured. Imogene, have you no idea who that son of Edward Aubrey may be?"

"How should I — I have never seen him."

"It is Eugene!"

She started up.

"Eugene! my brother Eugene! — that I have loved so long as my own, own brother. Then he is my cousin. Ah, no," her countenance falling, "not *my* cousin — not anything to *me* — I am nobody now."

"Not your brother — not your cousin — but more — far more, far more, I hope and believe. My dear, good Imogene — be patient and be reasonable — for I am going to task your patience and your reason to the utmost. Things have been so inexplicably, so unfortunately settled — that you cannot repair the wrong that has been done, except in one way; and that is — by giving up yourself, with your estates."

"How, Mamma?" looking quite bewildered.

"I spoke of the robe of Dejanira just now, did I not," said her mother, with much emotion; "poor child, these almost princely trappings in which you have been decked will prove that fatal robe to you."

"I know, mother," she said; "I understand — I cannot be forced to part with all this — you have told me the law cannot take it from me. I see — already I see," she went on, warming as she spoke, "the hor-

rible temptation that lies before me. It sounds an easy thing — but it is not an easy thing to part with all — all one has so loved — as I have loved these things. My life! my hope! my joy! my work! It will be very hard to do it — very, very hard — and time will not make it go easier, but harder with me — the more I think the harder it will be. It is already harder than it felt half-an-hour ago — but, so help me, Heaven — and Heaven *will* help an honest heart — but I will tear this poisoned vesture from me, though I let out my life-blood in doing it.”

Lady Emma actually groaned aloud.

“Fear me not, mother,” the young heroine went on — a sort of lustrous glory beaming in her eyes.

“But you do not, even yet, know all! Will this horrible revelation never be completed?” — with a cry of agony.

“What, more! — What, more!”

“Did I not tell you — did I not say — there is but one way. You cannot — such are the legal difficulties of the case — rid yourself of the wrong. You cannot give away the estate except you give yourself away with it — and, therefore, is it —”

She went on with a frenzied violence, as if again losing all command of herself.

“Therefore is it that I brought Eugene here — in order that you might learn to love each other from the first, and that, in due time, you might be all in all to each other — And therefore is it that I told you at first. Did I not tell you? No I didn't. I ought

to have known — you ought to have guessed — that any other marriage but this for you was impossible — that every law of conscience, justice, and honour, commands you to be the wife of Eugene Aubrey.”

“Nothing can command that,” said Imogene, firmly, “for that is impossible.”

“Impossible! — Impossible to make the only restitution in your power? — Wretched girl!”

“Impossible, mother!” repeated Imogene.

Her mother almost glared at her as she said, in a strange, unnatural voice —

“And you must keep these unholy gains.”

“This estate is not rightfully *mine* — I will *not* keep it.”

“Then you must give it, and yourself with it, to Eugene; for there is no other way.”

“I hope . . . I do not believe . . . I will write to Mr. Glenroy; I will speak to Mr. Elmsley. I am very young and inexperienced, and my heart throbs so, I do not know what I say — and I think I do not know what I am about, very well. I am only able to feel certain of one thing — that it would be the wickedest thing in the world for *me* to marry Eugene Aubrey — and that I will not do it.”

Alas! but before this terrible day had ended — before she laid her head upon her pillow, how was her simple direct sense of what was right, perplexed and confused?

Things which under other circumstances would have appeared to her as deep sins, now clothed themselves in the garments of angels of light. Inconstancy to the sacred sentiments of the heart — that treason to the most holy of human feelings — assumed the features of a noble and righteous sacrifice to truth and honour. Fidelity to her promises, to the long-understood pledges of her faith, could only be maintained at the expense of perseverance in one of the most atrocious instances of robbery and wrong which was ever effected by one human creature upon another.

In the silent watches of the night, communing with her own heart — before that inner tribunal, which may be silenced, but cannot be made to lie — Imogene began to question with herself, and to doubt.

She could not rest — sleep was impossible, though she kept trying for it. Well aware of the necessity of preserving her nerves from disorder in this great crisis of her fate, so that no physical derangement of those mysterious instruments of thought and action should interfere with the clear discrimination of where her duty lay, and a courageous resolution to discharge it.

For, ah! that duty — which way did it, indeed, lie?

She rose up, and in her long white dressing-gown, like some sad spectre — her cheek almost as bloodless and pale — no colour but that of her hair relieving the sepulchral hue of her garments — she paced up and down the corridor into which her room opened,

and in which a lamp at one end was always kept burning. The moon, through a window at the other end, threw broad masses of light upon the floor, as with an almost ominous aspect — as it appeared to the unhappy girl's imagination — she waded through black, heavy clouds, that hung like sable curtains round her.

Sometimes pausing at the window, and gazing disconsolately forth, then returning to her slow and measured walk in the corridor — up and down, up and down — so Imogene passed great part of the night.

Then feeling a little better, she would go back into her room, and, laying her throbbing head upon her pillow, would try to sleep.

But sleep came not — “The wretched He forsakes.”

Then she would rise from her pillow, again drink a glass of water, to moisten her parched lips, and resume her walk, and her endeavours at resignation and composure.

She would, and she did, cast herself upon Him!

“The Father of the fatherless, and the Husband of the widow, is God in His holy habitation.”

The text seemed whispered into her mind, as if by the voice of a kind friend, breathing within the sanctuary.

Poor young thing!

She was fatherless, and she was a widow; for her heart assured her but too sadly, that, decide as she

might in other respects, Albert and she were parted for ever.

Yet, when, calmed and soothed by the strength of that heavenly rest which she had sought, she began to look round upon her prospect, one comfort peeped sweetly upon her — almost to the banishing of all other considerations. Come what would, she would see him to-morrow. One more meeting of ineffable tenderness and trust! If they must part, of that moment of bliss nobody should deprive her! Besides, she rested upon Albert. She had as perfect a confidence in his good sense, in his rectitude, in his truth and honour, as in his tender affection and love.

He was her friend as well as her lover — he would show her what was right.

Thus beginning to feel a little supported and comforted, she thought of other things: of her two friends, — Mr. Glenroy, who loved her like his own child, and Mr. Elmsley, so calm, so gentle, yet so firm and immovable in his convictions.

And her eye was lifted up with a less troubled light in it. He who had already provided such friends in her calamity, had been, as He had promised, a shelter from the heat — “like the shadow of a great rock in a thirsty land.” There was a refuge in her distress, and a way to resolve her doubts and scruples beforehand, as it were, provided.

It was as if, before the thunderbolt fell and shattered the proud edifice of her fortunes, a little cabin had been raised for her under the shade of old and

well-loved trees. Thus it was, at least, that her excited imagination, in this great crisis of life, represented it.

And so, by soft degrees, more soothing thoughts stole over her.

She had found that on which to rest; and the whirling confusion of her mind subsided.

Once more she stood at the window. And now, the sable clouds had rolled away, and, like soft fleeces of silver, the vapoury tissue hung round the placid moon, which seemed to look upon her with a loving stillness, telling of other and better worlds than this.

And so she stood till soft, quiet, patient tears began to steal from her eyes.

At length, the gentle influence spread over her. Her eyelids became heavy — her throbbing pulses still — and, returning to her bed, she fell asleep, and slept with an infant's peace till morning.

CHAPTER XVI.

— Oh, Heavens!

Why does my blood thus muster to my heart,
Making both it unable for itself,
And dispossessing all my other parts
Of necessary fitness?

SHAKESPEARE.

LADY EMMA, when they had parted, was left, if possible, in a state still more deplorable than her daughter.

A confused sense of having been wrong added to the cruel pain of her feelings.

Her intentions and wishes seemed to have been right, and in that respect she stood acquitted to herself — but she could not feel so well satisfied with the feelings she had indulged.

She had suffered herself, from the first discovery of the terrible secret, to be influenced by it in a way the most strange and unnatural, as regarded her innocent child.

How little! — her accusing heart now told her — had she, in all her ceaseless, anxious ponderings upon the subject, considered the fate of that child. How little sympathized with one who, among all the sufferers involved in the consequences of this crime, was the most deeply to be pitied.

At first, as we have seen, an alienation from her own little girl, and the substitution of interest for another, was such as has probably appeared to most, and especially to every happy mother, as utterly un-

natural. Yet so it was — and such is too often the distortion of feeling produced by extraordinary circumstances, especially when linked with criminality, that I do not myself think it incredible. Hers was a character of impulse, as her whole life had shown, and though her impulses were generous and mostly good, yet no one, who has not learned to rule over himself, can tell where circumstance and impulse, unguided, may lead him.

It is true the sweet influence of Imogene's character had made its way to her mother's heart, and Lady Emma had learned to love and delight in her daughter, in spite of all the painful thoughts with which she was associated. She had done this more freely, happily, and fully of late, under the delusion of that hope which she had allowed to become almost a certainty.

In the sudden destruction of these hopes — the ruin and despair that surrounded her — the light of truth at last broke through; and she now saw herself as she had never seen herself before, and called herself — almost justly — barbarous!

What! Had she never — never once — amid all her regrets for Edward, for herself, for Eugene, felt as she ought for Imogene? True, Imogene appeared to her as the favourite of fortune — profiting, though unconsciously, by another's wrong; but had she never considered the instability of her position — never shuddered at the invisible but awful dangers that threatened her?

She hated herself. The Nemesis spoke at last.

The agony of the present, the love, and cruel heart-rending pity which the mother felt for the fated victim of crimes and errors not her own, avenged good and innocent Imogene at last.

Emma was, if possible, more miserable than her daughter. Like some poor creature, a captive in its wiry cage, her soul seemed rushing from side to side, vainly endeavouring to discover an issue. But one presented itself; it was the only way to disentangle these perplexities, and secure what was just without injury to any one.

Without injury to any one! Ah! Emma, were you never young?

When people have passed the years of youth themselves, they are apt to forget the force of that passion which is the rose, the ornament, the perfume of that sweet season. We have witnessed the sad prosaic ending of so many of those ardent attachments, that we come at last to under-rate their value, and, perhaps, to think, with Johnson, that if matches were arranged by the Lord Chancellor, it would be just as good a way as any other.

Lady Emma, disabused of life, despondent and disappointed herself, seemed to have lost the power of estimating what the strength of the young heart is; and, as she sat there, her nerves gradually recovering from their excessive agitation, hope once more began to dawn.

The engagement between Imogene and Albert could not have been an affair of long standing — it was

actually made but yesterday. The utter impossibility, in any event, of *that* engagement being persisted in, must be evident to every one. Time was all-powerful in matters of this nature. Time it would doubtless need; but how many have — had not she herself — when crossed in their earliest wishes, recovered their tranquillity, and been made comparatively happy in a second choice?

What was to be done?

The first, and most pressing necessity, was to gain time. Time for consideration, and, above all, for consultation with Mr. Glenroy. Numberless questions now presented themselves to her mind; and first, as related to the secret itself, which, in the excitement of her spirits, she had revealed to Imogene without waiting for that sanction from Mr. Glenroy, without which, as it had been understood between them, it was on no account to be disclosed.

So far, except the misery it had occasioned, no irremediable harm had been done. She could rely upon Imogene's honour not to reveal what she had heard, without her mother's and her guardian's permission. Poor dear! Emma felt too, that it was a secret no one in her circumstances could be impatient to divulge.

Time — time for thought — time for consultation — time to breathe — that was what they all must have.

She rejoiced that it would, at least, be some days before Eugene was to return — but then, it suddenly

flashed upon her mind that her daughter had said she expected to see Albert Faulconer on the morrow.

That must not be.

It was impossible, in the present state of things, to allow of a meeting. What could it avail but to rivet the bonds — the bonds already too strong — which bound them to each other, and increase the anguish of parting?

At all events, the meeting on the morrow ought to be prevented.

She started up and rang her bell. It was, by this time, between nine and ten o'clock in the evening. That mattered not. She wrote a hasty note to Albert, forbidding him, in the most absolute terms, to appear at Haughton on the next day, or until he heard from her again, and promising a somewhat fuller explanation in a short time. "For the present," the letter concluded by saying, "it was enough to state that, much as she esteemed, and might be said, to love him, it was impossible to allow him to entertain the slightest hopes of ever obtaining her consent to his wishes, and she besought him not to flatter himself that time would or could, make the slightest change in her sentiments."

She ordered a man and horse, late as it was, to set forward immediately for the Hazles, and ride all night, so that the note would be delivered, without fail, to Mr. Faulconer before he rose in the morning — and as if, by this effort, she had relieved herself of a most overwhelming load. She, too, borne down with fatigue,

and the weariness following violent emotion, went to bed, and fell asleep.

I was awakened early the next morning by Albert coming half dressed into my room, drawing open my curtains, and thrusting a note into my hand —

“What am I to think of *that*?”

I read it twice over.

“Coolly enough dismissed,” I said, angrily.

I cannot tell you how I felt the mortification, the affront — the insolent affront offered — which I thought was offered to him.

“You have always told me, Lenham,” he went on, “that there was nothing in my position in life to render me unfit to ask the hand of Imogene Aubrey. Knowing what a large heiress she was, I have had my alternations of doubt and pride, as any other might; but you had encouraged me in my belief — that there was no reason — that, I mean, it would not be such a degradation of herself as I ought not to allow — for her to listen to me — unworthy as I am.”

“I have always said so, because I have always thought so — and this most silly and arrogant letter of a nervous, irritable woman is not likely to alter my opinion. Imogene has a right to choose for herself. She has sense and discretion enough to be trusted with the disposal of her own heart. She has pledged it to a man that, in my opinion, deserves it as well, nay better, than any one I know — and if I were he,

having got possession of it, I would keep it — or I would know a better reason why than I find here.”

And I tossed the letter contemptuously from me.

“But — but —” said Albert, sitting down by my bedside, and speaking in a voice that faltered a little — “This is not all — I had a note from *her* last night.”

He drew a little crushed note from his bosom, as he spoke.

“See, how unlike her usual pretty hand!”

It was, in truth, a blotted, almost illegible, scrawl. The hand had been shaking terribly that wrote it.

“It bids me come to her to-day. I was just dressing; for I have scarcely slept all night, so impatient was I to be off, when Frank put this second note into my hand. What *can* be the matter?”

“Something unpleasant is the matter, certainly; but possibly only a painful scene between Imogene and her mother. The mother, if we may judge from her note, appears pretty decided. The dear girl, by the tenor of, and agitation visible in, hers, gives one reason to understand that there will be two voices to be heard in the business.”

“But what am I to do? Shall I go? Do you think I may still venture to go?”

I hesitated a little.

In the case of so great an heiress as Imogene, I felt a certain pride and delicacy for my friend which I think now, was somewhat exaggerated.

He did not speak, but kept his eyes fixed upon me, impatient for an answer.

"I don't know what to say," was the unsatisfactory conclusion, when it did come.

"You don't know what to say? Surely, Lenham, there cannot be a doubt about it — though I pretended to make one. Imogene bids me come, and I shall go."

I took up Lady Emma's letter again.

"The terms are most express — the mother absolutely forbids you to appear — 'for all their sakes' — she says in this postscript, which we have both overlooked — 'she conjures you' not to come to Haughton till you have heard from her again. She reiterates her entreaties — she begs — implores — for Imogene's sake — that you will wait till you hear from her. She repeats herself, as women do when they are most in earnest upon a subject. There is something more than common here. I do not much like Lady Emma, but she is kind-hearted and sincere. I did wrong to accuse her, in my first pettishness, of insolence. This is the cry of a suffering heart. Something more than common is the matter. No, you must not go."

"Not go!"

"Not till you have written again, at least. I think you cannot, in the face of such a note as this, force yourself into Haughton. I would write first — Send over a messenger immediately — After his return, you will have time left to ride over this evening. Write to Imogene — and entreat her to give you leave to come over, and have an explanation with her mother in person."

Most unwillingly I brought him to acquiesce in this.

He wanted the wings of the wind to carry him over; the delay was intolerable — but at length he yielded to my persuasions. He went to the table, where writing materials were lying, and wrote to Imogene thus —

Albert to Imogene.

“My darling! My treasure! My heart’s own treasure! What am I to think? I was starting to fly to you, my precious one, when a prohibition comes from your mother — an express prohibition — against my coming. What am I to think of this — coupled with your note of last night? She bids me give up all thoughts of you — and never to see you more. But you — you bid me come, my own! — and come I should, but that Lenham sees something I cannot see in your mother’s note, and exhorts me to write for your permission before I present myself. Send it me, then, my love. I shall follow my messenger, and wait to meet him upon his return.”

“Send Frank here.”

“Frank,” as he entered, “take a horse, and ride with this to Haughton Hall, as fast as you can lay legs to ground. You will have an answer to bring back. It shall be better for you if you make speed. Get them to lend you the best horse they have in the stable.”

My room looked the way of the stable-yard — you could partly see what was going on in it.

Albert placed himself at the window.

"The lazy rascal — what a time he is!"

"He was not dressed for riding."

"The fool! — Could not he have come down and got them to saddle his horse whilst he drew on his boots?"

He began to stamp with impatience.

"The snail-paced scoundrel! — I had better go myself — I had much better. I *will* be the bearer of the letter myself."

"No, no! — besides, you are not dressed. He will be ready before you are, and, if needs must, you can follow him."

"Oh, there he comes — ready mounted! Thank ye, my good fellow!" — throwing up the window and shouting — "I shall wait for you at Harlington Cross!"

The horse pranced and reared, startled at the sudden throwing up of the window.

"He rides like a jackass," said Albert, shutting it down, and returning to my bedside — "if a horse swerves but the tenth-part of an inch he can hardly keep his seat. I wonder what horse they have put him on. It's a brown, with white feet — an ugly beast enough! You have been here some days, have you made acquaintance with my Lord Ulick's stud?"

"I am not much of a stable-man — but I think I know the horse you mean — the groom rides it after his master — a hasty, ill-conditioned beast."

"Frank's a fool on a horse. I hope the brute won't throw him."

"Never fear — be easy! — Frank will manage him, I'll engage. He was used to all sorts of mounts whilst we were abroad."

"How long will it take to get to Haughton? for I don't know the country."

"Somewhere about three hours for a carriage, I think I understood."

Albert appeared at breakfast, but at luncheon he was absent, and he did not return to dinner.

His mother became inquisitive.

She sent for me out, when dinner was over, and asked me if I knew what had become of him.

"Very strange!" she said; "he was to have gone to Haughton last evening. He did not go. When I inquired the reason, he merely said — it was put off, and turned away, as if not liking to be questioned. He is gone to Haughton now, of course; but I wonder I did not hear a word about it. However," she asked, with a meaning smile, "his remaining there cannot have much harm in it?"

"No;" I answered; "of course it must be all right."

"Did he tell you he was going to Haughton?"

"So I expect — I know he went that way."

"Thank you. He is a naughty boy, to go without giving me a word — I should have begged for a line, if only one, by an express messenger, that I might have got it to-night — one feels anxious to hear what Lady Emma will say."

Lady Faulconer, in fact, felt very much more

anxious to hear what Lady Emma would say, than she chose to confess.

It was between eleven and twelve o'clock at night, as I was lighting my candle in the front hall, that I heard some one come in hastily from the stable-way into the back-hall where the staircase was, and run up-stairs in a strangely hurried way — I heard a door near the head of the stairs, which I knew to be Albert's, banged to and double-locked.

I followed him, and stopped at his door.

There was from within the noise as of one thrown upon the bed and writhing with agony — I thought I heard low groans.

I ventured to try the lock.

"Who's that?" in a voice of rage, and starting up; "let the door alone, can't you?"

"It is I — Lenham."

"Oh! you — my good fellow! But go away — go away — leave me alone — can't you leave me alone," almost wildly, as I still hesitated, and moved the lock in my hand. "Leave me alone, for Heaven's love, if you would not have me fling myself out of the window."

"Albert, let me speak — everybody is gone to bed; let me in, there's a good fellow — let me in."

"If you would not have me curse you," he cried, with a tremendous oath, "you would take yourself away."

"Oh!" and I heard him dash himself on the bed again; "I *must* have it to myself — Oh! I *must* have it to myself — my love and my despair!"

"Dear Albert!"

"Go, go, I beseech, I pray, I beg — let me wrestle with it alone; I will come to you in the morning — perhaps in the night; but let me wrestle with it alone at first."

"But I dare not — you may do yourself an injury."

"Oh! no — no," and I heard him burst into tears, "that would make *her* unhappy. Imogene! my sweet, loving, innocent Imogene!"

I was more easy now; he wept — he was no longer desperate.

"I will go, then; come to me as soon as you can."

I threw myself upon the bed, but I could not sleep; I lay listening, hoping every moment to hear his footsteps. At last I got up, unable to bear my anxiety any longer, and crept to his door.

I heard him walking up and down his room; but, as he seemed composed, I did not venture to disturb him; I returned to my own, and threw myself again upon my bed.

Presently I heard a door open — some one coming along the passage; he laid his hand upon my lock, and entered.

I was shocked to see how excessively ill he looked. The change which a few hours had produced was terrible. Once in his life before I had seen him thus shook and broken to pieces, like some wretch who had

endured the torture of the rack. I was springing up to meet him, but he motioned me to remain as I was.

"Lie where you are," he said, "and I will sit down by you; I am quiet now, and I can tell you all."

"You know I started almost immediately after I left you this morning; that was foolish enough — it was impossible that Frank should arrive at Haughton to deliver his letter, receive an answer, and be back at Harlington Cross, before twelve or one o'clock — but I felt in that sort of irritable impatience which keeps one in such an insupportable state that one must be doing something. So I borrowed one of Lord Ulick's horses — and rode off. When I got to Harlington Cross, my horse, to my surprise, seemed a good deal blown; but the stables are not managed here as if Ulick were my father instead of the sailor that he is — so I began to think that whilst I waited for Frank, I had better put him up and give him a feed, for I expected but one answer to my note — a summons to fly to her — and I wanted a winged horse for that.

"So I put him up, and, having seen him all right, in order to pass the time away, I went and walked about the lanes in the neighbourhood.

"I knew it was impossible that Frank should be back before twelve, hardly expected him before one; but twelve — one — two — three — came, and he appeared not.

"I waited with a patience I wonder at, as you will; but I had a sort of nervous fear of missing him in

these cross-country roads if I left the place appointed, and I kept lingering on, quarter after quarter of an hour, expecting every quarter of an hour would bring him — till it went four, and still he was not to be seen.

“I resolved, then, to mount and ride towards Haughton, and see what was become of him; for longer suspense was not to be borne. I rode on — but nothing was to be seen of him, till at length I saw the chain of the Armidale hills before me, and the well-known beloved woods of dear, dear Haughton crowning them at a distance — oh! you know them well — how my heart has ever leaped when first they came in sight.

“I spurred my horse and cantered on, despairing of seeing anything of Frank, and feeling afraid he had blundered in his orders, lost his way, or something — and so I resolved to dare all, and see her, cost what it would.

“I was drawing near the well-loved place and reached that turn where one enters the very domain, and where the road parts off one way to her Armidale — which she has so loved and tended, the other to that enchanted palace that holds all that is dearest, loveliest, and most precious of human beings. My heart began to beat fast — I put spurs to my horse and galloped on — when, just before I reached the outermost lodge-gate, I saw a man and horse coming down the road. It was Frank.

“I drew up.

'What *have* you been about? Have you a letter?'

'Yes, Sir — here it is.'

"That's the letter."

And he ended this little narration, which he had gone through with a sort of forced calmness, by putting the letter into my hands.

Letter it was not, it was a short hurried scrawl, and blistered over with tears.

"My dear, dear, dear Albert."

"No, you must not come — even Mr. Elmsley says I had better not — that it is not right to see you yet — perhaps never again — Oh, it can't be never! It shan't be never! I am in a dreadful, dreadful position, my Albert. I want your help and counsel — but they tell me I must not have it, it would be wrong. I don't know well what is right or wrong, my head turns round so; but you must not come — no, no, you must not come — I don't know what I say — but love your poor Imogene — oh, that is wrong — If I were generous I should say forget her, and all about her; but — but Heaven forgive me, for I cannot, cannot say it."

He took the letter again from me in silence, saw my eyes were moist, and he took my hand and pressed it.

"And so you came home?"

"No, I did not. I went on."

"You did!"

"I rode into the stable-yard, gave them my horse to hold, and went to the house by that little garden glass door. You can't have forgotten it."

"The door was unlocked, and I went in.

"There was a strange silence in the house. Along that passage you know of, which leads to the servants' hall, there came the distant noise of servants going about and talking; but even that seemed quieter than usual — servants in those great houses don't care much for the sorrow above stairs; but there are some that reach even to them."

"Well," I said — impatient to hear more.

"I have nothing to tell. I did not get to see her. I went on till I came into the great hall; there was not a creature to be seen, and everything as quiet as if they had all been dead. I ventured up-stairs. I looked down the corridor that leads to her room. Do you remember how we have stood and watched her, sweet little creature, as she used to trip away in her pretty white frock — like a fairy so bright, scarcely seeming to touch the ground with her little feet — and how I have stood there waiting for her, with all a boy's passion — a man's passion may be more violent, but it cannot be honester?"

"Well!"

"There is nothing to tell you — scarcely."

"Surely you did not come back as you went?"

"No — not quite. As I stood there, I saw her door — *her* door open — and I felt frozen. You think I should rush forward. No, I trembled in every limb — I literally, at the instant, could not move. But it was not herself — oh, no, it was only old Nurse.

"I found the use of my limbs as soon as I knew

who it was. I hurried to meet her. She started, clasped her hands, uttered a faint shriek, and said — ‘Heaven and earth! Mr. Faulconer, what brings you here?’ — ‘I want to see your mistress — I am come to see your mistress — I must and I will see Imogene.’ ‘Oh, Sir, Sir! — you can’t — you can’t, indeed! — Do you know, something has happened — we can’t tell what — but there’s dreadful work. She is as patient as a dove, is my sweet bird, but the flesh is weak; and her mother, she’s not — it does not become me to speak — but Lady Emma’s not altogether quite the sort of mother as that precious creature ought for to have.’ ‘But good heavens!’ I cried, shaking with impatience, ‘what’s all this about? I must and will speak to Imogene.’ ‘Oh, hush — hush — Don’t, don’t, you’ll disturb her — and I have at last got her to sleep, but she’s been fearfully ill.’”

“Oh, Lenham! — can I bear to go on — is it possible! Yet I like it — It is a sort of last lingering pleasure to recollect all — every word, every look.” But having said this, he went on with more agitation.

“She had had a terrible night, Nurse said — up and down, up and down, she heard her — but she forbade her to come to her — she said she *must* be alone. She looked fearfully pale and ill in the morning, but she kept up till twelve o’clock, as if expecting some one. Then a horse was heard coming up the avenue, and she started up and clasped her hands, as if in an ecstasy of joy, Nurse said. But it

was only Mr. Elmsley, who was returning, after having been absent a day or two. When she heard who it was, she sat down with a look of patient disappointment, Nurse said it would have broken a heart of stone to behold. She seemed trying to hold up, but her lips went quite white, and, for the first time, she asked for some sal volatile. She seemed better after taking it — and went and placed herself at a window in her room, from which you can just catch a glimpse of the approach, so as to see if any one is coming.”

Albert's lips were almost blue with suppressed emotion, as he stopped in his relation, and said —

“You guess who she was expecting.”

“Yes — yes.”

“It was past two o'clock when my servant arrived with the note. When she got it, she seemed very much hurried, Nurse said, and more like being angry than she ever saw her before in her life. She went in haste down to her mother's room. She found Mr. Elmsley with Lady Emma.

“She staid there a long time. Nurse knows nothing of what passed — but she came up again at last — snatched at, rather than took, her writing things — scrawled that last note to me — gave it to Nurse to take to my servant; — and when Nurse came up again, she found her in a dead faint, flat on the floor.

“I can't go on — I can't go on” — he cried, covering his face with both hands, and the tears streaming through his fingers. “That's her! —

That's my Imogene! — torn from me in this mysterious way — That's what I've lost — Heaven help me!"

He wept some time, like a child, poor fellow! At last he proceeded —

"When she came to herself, she begged Nurse not to fetch her mother. 'Take care of me yourself, dear Nursey,' said the darling — as old Nurse told it. Nurse was sadly frightened — there was one fainting fit after another — but 'no cries, or hysterics, or fuss,' says Nurse — 'she's not one of that sort — just going quietly off, one fit after another — She couldn't help that, you know — She's one as never makes a fuss, but she can't help the dead swoons, you know, Sir.' And so — and so — Nurse at last got her into her bed, and at last to sleep. She had just fallen asleep — and 'Oh, Sir! — as you value her life, don't ask me to disturb her — indeed I can't, I won't disturb her, not even for *you*.' She said those very words, Lenham — she guesses how it is.

"And so I came away — I don't know how, nor what I said; — what between rage and despair — and love, oh, such love! — such as I did not know one *could* feel for anything. I left a message with nurse, begging her to let me see her, if it were only for five seconds; and that I would be there in the morning, and so I shall — and I rode home like a madman — but I am quieter now.

"I am wonderfully composed now."

CHAPTER XVII.

What equal torment to the grieve of minde,
And pynning anguish hid in gentle heart,
That inly feeds itself with thoughts unkinde,
And nourisheth her own consuming smart?

SPENSER.

THERE are passages in some lives, when the soul, exposed to a fearful temptation, is summoned at once to cast down all that is dearest in the world, and, in the full extent of its meaning, "take up the cross," at the call of obedience and duty.

The soul struggles, as in deep waters, and a horror of great darkness overshadows her — standing, as it were, upon the edge of that fearful gulf which severs the two eternal regions — trembling as she looks down into those depths of sin into which this one disobedience to the great command may hurl her — yet shuddering, reluctant, in the weakness of her mortality, before the immensity of the sacrifice she is called upon to make, when she flings away all that this world contains most dear.

In this strait, the soul of the young, but heroic girl was agonizing — Her agony increased by that sort of hesitating uncertainty as to what was the right — or, rather — I should say — (for I think from the first, whatever others may have felt, she had no hesitation herself as to what must be right) — tempted by the thousand pleading voices of contradictory feelings and principles, which it seemed impos-

sible to reconcile — calling upon, and persuading her to swerve from the direct line — the narrow path of rectitude — in obedience to the tender, faithful affection that yearned about her heart.

Her love and constancy to Albert — his excellence, his sincere attachment — his broken hopes and heart, were pleaded! — How would he have adorned the station which he would have occupied by her side! What a faithful regent he would have proved over her little empire! — Then her people! — how greatly everything connected with their welfare and happiness must depend upon the husband she should choose! Could she have chosen better? — Alas! — Where so well? — And then the excessive happiness! — The virtuous, rational yet rapturous happiness! Though it *was* one's own happiness — was it to be counted as nothing? was such an inestimable treasure as perfect happiness to be flung away?

Thus the voices called and clamoured.

There was but one answer.

“I firmly in my conscience believe, that this property is not rightfully mine. The law gives it me, it is true, and my mother — with her usual resolute adherence to the exact truth, whatever her wishes may be — and I see how ardently she desires that which she believes to be just — my mother has not concealed this from me, that if I choose to hold this property I may. No power on earth can wrest it from me. But she tells me that I hold it by a double wrong — Ah, my father! I asked her not to enlighten me

as to that, but in offering that prayer my heart made a secret vow, that the wrong — though unexplained — I would make good!"

Perhaps my readers may think it an easy matter to abdicate — to throw up a rich inheritance and become a beggar for conscience' sake! "but, let not him that putteth on his armour rejoice like him who taketh it off."

Yet you will all anticipate what happened, and that right, in a heart like Imogene's, triumphed. She would yield the inheritance to Edward Aubrey's rightful heir. This was the first great sacrifice she felt called upon to make.

When she had established herself firmly in this resolution, she became more easy. If it had not been for the thoughts of Albert, she would have taken a certain pleasure in giving place to Eugene, whom, in spite of all his faults, she loved as a brother; but to come penniless to Albert — to whom she had held out the prospect of such a rich endowment — and more especially as it regarded his family — could she bear to do it? His friends, she well knew, though expensive in their habits, were not rich. She had been upon too intimate terms with them not to be well aware of that circumstance. She doubted whether it would be right — whether it would even be possible — for the marriage now to take place. He, just entering into life, to be hampered with a marriage to one without fortune or connexions.

"Nothing but this poor heart to give, now," as she said sadly to herself.

Of course she must release him from his engagement; that was, as she told herself, what she had to do in that meeting which she had so much desired. But there was a sweet, loving, flattering voice which whispered within her mind, that thus it would not all end — that they should not part thus for ever — and in this sweet hope she waited impatiently, yet not altogether unhappily, till Albert should appear.

We have seen that it was not until the afternoon that she received his note, and learned that her mother had forbidden him to come; and then she dimly recollected, as one does a half-remembered dream, something that had passed on the yesterday, about Eugene.

That idea — supposing even the notion of that idea was not a mere delusion — had been at once and indignantly scouted, and driven from her mind as something alike impious and impossible. Indeed, so completely had she rejected it, and substituted at once the alternative of preserving her freedom, and relinquishing her fortune, that, thinking her mother acquiesced, she had dismissed that odious subject from her thoughts.

But now it rushed to her recollection again.

What could her mother intend by forbidding Albert the house?

She felt angry. It was a new feeling for her. She scarcely knew what it was to be angry — so gentle and kind was her nature. Now she rose hastily, as

Nurse has described her doing, and hurried down to Lady Emma's dressing-room. She found Mr. Elmsley sitting there.

His usually pale face was paler than ever, and extreme mental pain was written on his brow.

"Mr. Elmsley!" — then, going up to Lady Emma, who was looking still more weak and suffering than usual — but, for once, Imogene felt neither interest nor pity — "Mother, have you forbidden Albert Falconer the house to-day?"

"Yes, Imogene — Child, don't be angry — Child, don't look angry — I never saw you look so before. Pity me, Imogene — it was right — indeed it was right; ask Mr. Elmsley."

"Have they told you all?" turning to Mr. Elmsley.

"Yes," he said, sadly — "Lady Emma has confided the whole to me. It is safe with me as with yourself."

"I don't doubt that — I was not thinking of that — What I ask is, why I must not see Albert? — What he will do — what *we* will do? — it is for ourselves to settle in the best way we can. You need not be afraid, mother, that I shall hold him to his engagement; but I *must* see him again, if it is only to tell him that, at the cost of all I possess in the world, I shall adhere to my duty. It will comfort him to know I love him, and am true to him — as it would me if our places were changed — and he shall have that comfort."

"But," said Mr. Elmsley, rising and taking her by the hand, and leading her to a chair which stood at

the foot of her mother's sofa — "Dear Miss Aubrey" ... and then he hesitated, as if seeking for words.

"Imogene" — said her mother rising, and coming and sitting by her, and she took her hand — "I think you could not have understood all I told you last night."

I will not repeat the scene which followed when the tenour of her father's will was once more distinctly explained to Imogene, — and at the same time, Lady Emma, who thought it now an imperative duty to tell all, related the history of the wrong that had been done to Edward, in the matter of the disinheritance, and she was made to understand the utter impossibility of making restitution, except in one way — a way from which she revolted with an abhorrence not to be overcome.

"It is — it is — a fearful strait," Mr. Elmsley kindly said; "yet the alternative of persisting in this gigantic injustice must be to a soul like yours, Imogene, impossible. But, understand, all your mother at present asks is time — time for you to reflect — time to examine the question yourself; and, my dear, surely, for the present, you will agree with her, that you ought not to see Mr. Faulconer!"

She was silent.

She had struggled with a force of resistance quite unnatural in her — a vehemence, approaching to violence, against the hateful idea; but the violence began to abate, as her blood seemed to chill, and her heart felt dying within her — like that of some poor hunted creature, enveloped in an inextricable snare — for

whom it only remains to submit, the victim to an invincible force. She yielded — all that was womanly and right within her yielded — to Mr. Elmsley's representations.

The high colour which had mounted into her cheeks subsided, the flashing eyes became dim. All spirit had left her now. Pale, drooping, and subdued, she rose from her seat, and saying, —

“I may at least write to him myself — to tell him this — that will be but kind — I will go and do it.” She crept, or rather tottered away, and went to her own room.

Some few days have now passed, during which Imogene, who was by this time seriously ill, had been obliged to keep her chamber. One request she had made to her mother, which Lady Emma immediately granted; this was that, under some pretence or other, Eugene should be kept from Haughton, until she should receive an answer to the appeal she should herself make to Mr. Glenroy.

This appeal was her last hope.

The hope was a vague, but it was a strong one. The difficulties with which she was surrounded were, to all appearance, insurmountable; yet she had such faith in Mr. Glenroy, that she believed him capable of overcoming almost everything. She had the most entire reliance upon his affection, and upon his principles; she felt sure that he would not suffer her to be sacrificed to any consideration upon earth, except the

demands of strict justice. And he had so often shown his ability in reconciling contradictions, and overcoming difficulties, that she felt certain that, if it were in the power of any human being to help her, he would.

She waited till she had recovered a little strength before writing this letter. Perhaps she was not sorry to find an excuse for delay. Though hope predominated, yet she often shuddered and started — a prey to vague apprehensions; for her nerves were already so dreadfully shattered, that she would have been the victim of fear where no fear was. How much more did she suffer from it now!

At last she wrote.

Her letter was simple, and exactly truthful. Truthful, as a matter of course, it would be in the relation of facts; but it was more than this, — no feeling was withheld; all was related with the utmost fidelity. Her own secret convictions — her sincere struggles not to deceive herself or tamper with her conscience — her regrets as regarded the property; and last, and most important, the state of her affections, and the revolt of nature against the unnatural alliance which was proposed, and which her whole soul rejected as impossible.

Nothing was left undescribed, and all was related with a strength of feeling — a simplicity and single-hearted desire to do right, which made the letter the most affecting composition I have ever read in my life. I would copy it out for you, but that it was but

a repetition of what, in attempting to describe her state of mind, I have already related.

The sinkings of the spirit — the flutterings of the heart — with which Mr. Glenroy's answer was awaited, they, alone, can adequately realize who have known what it is to have all they hold dearest in life dependent upon one single cast.

Already sadly weakened by the first shock, and the dreadful revulsion of feeling which had followed it — these few days of expectation exhausted her lamentably. In vain she struggled for patience, courage, and faith. Suspense is an awful thing to endure. The best remedies of the soul, which aid us in supporting the fixed and inevitable, seem powerless whilst all is trembling in the balance. She cast her humble, trusting eye upwards, but her heart could not find a moment's rest.

At length a letter, directed by the well-known handwriting, arrived.

She was sitting in her mother's dressing-room when the post-bag came in, but no sooner had she caught a glance at the address, than she started up, seized the letter, and fled — not to her own room — in that place she might have been found, and been called away — but to bury herself in the very depths of the woods.

Arrived there, she felt secure from interruption. She threw herself panting upon a bench — but kept holding the letter before her unopened — turning it — looking at it — trembling to unseal it — neverthe-

less, with an internal presentiment that in it she should find a rescue. When had the affection of Mr. Glenroy ever failed her? When had his advice been anything but a source of comfort, and a relief from every difficulty? — a never-failing solace.

At last she took courage, unfolded the paper, and read as follows —

Mr. Glenroy to Imogene.

“MY VERY DEAR CHILD,

“That which I have long in silence apprehended has then, at last, come to pass! — and the curse which follows crime and folly, but in which you had no share, has fallen upon your innocent head.

“This law of retribution we find written in the ancient sentence from on high — ‘The children to suffer for the sins of their fathers.’ From this sentence I have vainly struggled to shelter you, even to the very verge, perhaps beyond it, of what was strictly right. In my presumption, endeavouring to wrestle with the eternal mandate. But what was I? to strive at the impossible — to attempt to erase the past — the past, graven, as with a pen of iron, upon the immutable rock of ages.

“My child, I am now lying stretched upon a bed of pain and sickness, from which, at my age, it is probable I shall not again rise; and things — believe me, my good girl — assume a very different aspect at hours such as these, from what they do in the full energy of life. I now begin to perceive that, in my

passionate desire to save the little child from the consequences of that which I too hastily decided upon as a mere romance, exaggerated by imagination and wayward feeling, I refused conscientiously to examine into its truth, and I would not suffer myself calmly to weigh the evidence of that which ran so counter to my own wishes.

“I would not even patiently listen to the details of what I chose to denominate an absurd, incredible invention — nor would I admit the possible claims of him I chose to consider as raised to importance, merely through the partiality of one and the strange, morbid imaginations of another.

“The law was appealed to — and the law decided as I had anticipated that it would; and this served to strengthen me in my obstinate perseverance in the course I had adopted.

“I use the word obstinate deliberately; there *was* obstinacy in the part I took. There was an evil will, as well as a blinded perception. I did not see, because I would not see.

“In this course I have persisted.

“You know, my child, that I have endeavoured to rear you in the manner I thought best calculated to make you able worthily to discharge the heavy duties and responsibilities which possessions such as yours entail. So far I stand acquitted to myself.

“For several years this was done, in the honest, unshaken conviction, that you were, in fact, the real heiress of these estates, and that no being existed who

had a right to dispute your claim. But now, my dear girl, I must come to confession, and tell you all that has passed within me. I will open my heart to you, as you have done yours to me.

"As time rolled on, my convictions began to be shaken.

"The absolute assurance that I was right, which I had managed to maintain so long, began slowly — almost insensibly, to give way.

"I began to doubt — and more than to doubt.

"Yet I was a man made of obstinate materials — one little accustomed to change, far less to retract — for I was too proud, too self-willed to confess an error.

"Long I resisted the suspicions which gradually strengthened within me, and even when they had amounted almost to conviction, to no one on earth were they acknowledged.

"My dear girl, the evidence that convinced me was written, in characters not to be mistaken, upon Eugene's face and yours.

"These characters are often scarcely discernible in childhood, but as years advance the indelible marks of family descent become more and more apparent. In the present instance they were not to be denied. The great Author of Nature seemed to have impressed them with an emphasis which it was impossible to resist.

"It has pleased Him, who is justice and truth in their essence, that such characters should, in this case,

have been so distinctly marked, that my conscience has been for some time unable to resist the appeal. Your own likeness to her who claimed your father for her son, and Eugene's to the unhappy Edward Aubrey, are alike great — I may say extraordinary. Others might not have been convinced by a circumstance of this nature. Men are variously affected by the same evidence. I who refused to listen to any other, felt myself forced to yield to this.

“The impression made upon me, I must also acknowledge, has led me to a more careful review of the question, than in my pride and obstinacy I would give it before. The result has been, that Eugene Aubrey suffers under a twofold wrong.

“You will ask me, my child — not without a secret sentiment of reproach — why, when this conviction was arrived at, was it not immediately made known. Alas! to what avail?

“I had, by my own contrivance and advice, wound round you an inextricable web, from which there was but one means of escape. I had reason to believe that these means — the only ones we could look to for the ultimate satisfaction of justice — were in a fair way of being obtained. Such being my hope and belief, it was my opinion — and, in spite of all, still remains my opinion — that it was most important, both to your and Eugene's happiness, that this secret should never be revealed to either of you.

“To possess this secret, could in no way profit any one — your marriage would afford your poor

mother and me the opportunity for seeing that full justice was done — and, shall I confess, my good girl, I might be a little biassed, by my extreme desire that you should not altogether relinquish that authority which you had administered so greatly to the happiness and advantage of so many, and which increasing years would enable you to make a progressively increasing benefit to all.

“I own, before these convictions which I have confessed to you were admitted to myself, I felt secretly inclined to oppose your mother, in what I knew to be the earnest desire of her heart, namely, the formation of an attachment between you and Eugene; I felt inclined, may be, as much from perverseness of temper, as from anything else, to look with greater favour upon Albert Faulconer. Of late, however, my wishes — my hopes — my prayers, have all centred in one object — that of a union between you and Eugene, as the only means remaining of making restitution possible, and reconciling the contradictions and difficulties which surround us.

“It was but too evident to me that by this, and by this alone, wrong might be atoned for, and justice done, and this without the necessity of unveiling the lamentable histories, which not only entailed such grievous doubts and perplexities, but, even worse than that, would have indelibly stained your father’s fair name.

“Now, my child, all is not yet lost.

“This most painful history of wrongs and crimes

still remains a secret between us four — you, your mother, Elmsley, and myself — and so it may for ever remain, if my dear Imogene has the courage to do that, which it is my conscientious conviction that she ought to do — a conviction which I hope and believe I shall bring her to share.

“In the first place, then, rest assured that, rightly or wrongly — as far as I was concerned in advising the terms and disposition of the will, I now think wrongly — the truth is, you cannot rid yourself of this fortune.

“You cannot lay it down. Except as an endowment in marriage, you cannot bestow it. Even were you to die, it is a doubt with me whether you could bequeath it; but you are young, and you are not likely to die — and Heaven forbid you should.

“Now, my dear — though I never was given much to enter into what people call the romance of life — I think, in your simple description of the state of your feelings, I can understand what it must cost you to resign that which you look upon as so essential to your happiness, and to turn your thoughts another way.

“Yet, my Imogene, rely upon it such things may be done.

“Disappointments of this nature are occurring every day — for one youthful attachment that comes to a happy conclusion, hundreds are frustrated.

“More especially is this the case in the higher grades of social rank. As we rise in the scale, the

necessity for such sacrifices becomes more frequent. What are princes but the regular victims of such arrangements? We expect them unhesitatingly to acquiesce, because upon them the well-being of millions may perhaps depend. We demand an unhesitating sacrifice of inclination upon their part to considerations so vast and important — and would despise, as a contemptible weakness, the attempt, to plead what are called the interests of the heart, against considerations so vast and overwhelming.

“And are not the interests of JUSTICE equally binding upon *you*?

“Justice is not a matter of degree.

“Justice is an eternal, infinite, absolute obligation, from which there is no power upon earth to release us.

“This obligation, in my opinion, lies upon you, now.

“For as I expect speedily to appear before the Fountain of all justice, so may I find mercy tempering it to me, as I believe that you wrongfully hold the possessions which you have inherited — and, that the safe way — the rightful way — the one way — the only way — to repair the evil committed is that which we point out.

“If, child, you doubt my conclusions, you have a right to the benefit of your doubts. If you resolve to hold your possessions and maintain the freedom of your choice, I do not believe any law in this land can touch you. But consider well what, in that case, you would do.

“You would carry that which is not rightfully yours

into another family — to give birth, perhaps, to heirs who from your hands shall receive and carry the inheritance down — and with it — who knows? — maybe, a curse. The blasting curse which the history of kingdoms, as of families, leads us to believe actually does attend, like some inseparable appendage, upon unrighteous possession.

“I think I have exhausted all I had to say.

“My dear child, I cannot, and will not believe, but that your own reflections will add force to what I have urged. I know you have a brave and righteous heart — a heart such as the heroines of the old time possessed; I call upon it now to struggle against and to overcome this youthful inclination; I call upon it to resist the delusions of passion — to break through the trammels which, as I am told, inthral those who have entered into — shall I venture to style it? — the Fool’s Paradise of love.

“I exhort you to look the matter resolutely and boldly in the face — to hold fast by duty, wisdom, truth, and justice — to stand to the permanent and the eternal, and, like dew-drops from the lion’s mane, shake off the fleeting dreams of imagination and passion.

“I shall write to your mother and Mr. Elmsley by next post.

“It is my strenuous advice to you, Imogene; nay, I command, as much as your guardian has now a right to command, that, as regards that mystery which hangs about yourself, the most profound secrecy should

still be observed, and that Eugene may never be made acquainted with it. It will be sufficient to make him aware of his own position, as the son of your father's elder brother, and the opinion of us all, that it was owing to a misconception of circumstances that the disinheritance took place; also, that such was your own father's latest conviction, and that he proved it by the endeavour he made to rectify the injustice, through a will which he did not live to execute.

"Under these circumstances, it will be for your mother to give him to understand what her and my wishes are, and then leave him to proceed in the way he likes best.

"Farewell, my dear, dear Imogene.

"If I have written in any way to pain you, forgive your old friend. Remember he lies where all must sooner or later come, and where we dare not dissemble with ourselves, or others. Believe me, my child, when you, in your turn, come so to lie, it will not make your pillow less peaceful that in the spring time of youth you offered up a favourite inclination to the claims of right and duty. And so receive a poor sinner's prayers and blessings.

"ANDREW GLENROY."

CHAPTER XVIII.

Had we never felt so kindly,
Had we never loved so blindly,
Never met, or never parted —
We had ne'er been broken-hearted.

BURNS.

Do you know what it is to have the heart die within you?

It is a common expression — everybody talks of their heart dying within them, but do you know what it really is?

Few — very, very few — I trust and believe, have ever experienced it.

It is when, in the full spring-tide of youthful existence — before we have been hardened by disappointment, or have received one lesson in the apprenticeship of sorrow — life shuts in at once with all its prospects, and hope is totally extinguished.

Then that human heart of flesh — whose nourishment is happiness, and the wine of whose existence is hope — dies.

Sometimes it bursts at once, and there is an end of it. Sometimes it receives the mortal wound, and slowly, though surely, by degrees, expires.

It was as if her heart went at once quite cold.

It was not racked and torn with violent emotions; she did not faint and fall down — far less shriek and tear her hair — far less than all, was she able to shed a tear.

She sat quite still, — chilled to the very core, as if all the warmth within was gone.

She saw it all.

There was neither help nor hope — nor even sympathy. It was plain, by the whole tenor of Mr. Glenroy's letter, that he had not the slightest conception of the true distress of the case. The transference of affection — to her that invincible impossibility — seemed to him only one of those difficulties in human life which a little resolution might overcome.

A pain, like other pains, to be struggled with and endured, in the cause of right. Not a crime against all that was best and most sacred in human nature — a sin as monstrous as impossible!

Her last anchor had now given way. Drifting on the wild ocean of despair, she felt that utter solitude of the soul which, to one still so young, so affectionate, so docile and good, so anxious to seek counsel, and so earnest to consider and follow it — was the extremity of desolation and ruin.

And so she remained passive for some time, in all the dreariness and darkness of her anguish.

She tried to look up — but even the very light above seemed darkened. She sank under that melancholy sense of utter abandonment, which is the final proof that the combat within is becoming too strong, and that the powers of life are about to give way.

That utter darkness never lasts long with the truly pious, loving, and humble — but there are moments when this feeling of abandonment — the last fierce

trial of affliction — is added to the rest. We should none of us taste the full bitterness of the cup if it were not so.

She could not at present reflect. She felt that some great resolution upon her part was called for — but it must be the work of time. Suddenly and hastily she would not take it. All that she could at present arrive at, was, that whatsoever she felt convinced was right that she would endeavour to do.

By-and-by she got up to return to the house. She was surprised at her own feebleness when she rose. It was as if she had gone through a sharp paroxysm of illness. Her knees knocked together — she could hardly stand. She tottered along, however, got up-stairs, and then patiently laid herself down upon her sofa to suffer. She did not feel equal to appearing at dinner, and sent down an excuse. They sent her up a little delicate food, but it went away untouched. A glass of water was all she could swallow.

The moment dinner was over, Lady Emma flew up-stairs.

“My dearest child, what is the matter?”

She held out her hand to her mother, smiled sadly and faintly, but did not speak.

“Anything new? What is it, my love? You look worse than ever. What can have happened?”

“Only,” speaking with difficulty, “a letter from Mr. Glenroy.”

“It is come, then? Ah! my dear girl! and what does he say?”

"He says — as you do" —

And she closed her eyes and lay still. She was struggling to keep down a scream of agony.

"May I see the letter?"

She felt as if she were furnishing arms against herself; yet as if it would not be loyal and honest to withhold anything.

She gave it to her mother.

Lady Emma read it with deep attention — sorrowful attention I might say — and it was some slight consolation to Imogene, upon that dreadful day, to find that her mother could feel pain at receiving support to her own wishes and opinions. When she had finished, she stooped down and kissed her daughter's pale and chilling cheek.

"You *are* an angel from Heaven, Imogene," she said reverently.

Imogene opened her eyes.

"Mother! But I have not yet decided what to do."

"No, my love, but — but you see your way."

"I don't know — I think — yes," she went on, as if inspired by a sudden thought, "I think I *do* see my way, but it lies through deep waters."

She remained in her own room for the next three days, only leaving it now and then to take a little air in the shrubberies, leaning upon nurse's arm.

At the end of this time, she sent to speak to Mr. Elmsley.

She then told him that she had arrived at one conclusion, of the necessity of performing one duty there could be no doubt — that of dissolving her engagement with Albert, and she had already written to him for the purpose. With respect to Eugene — she said, she must have time. She left it to her mother and Mr. Elmsley to proceed as Mr. Glenroy advised, or in any other way that they might think better. One thing she felt satisfied ought to be done — that his true position, as related to the Aubrey family — and the nature of his rights, as regarded the erroneous impressions under which Mr. Aubrey made his last will — ought to be immediately communicated. She thought this might be done, and her father's memory be sacredly respected — and she made it a condition of any future concession on her part that this should scrupulously be attended to.

As for Eugene himself — all she could at present promise, was, that she would try to do him justice.

“But, perhaps — it is possible” — while a faint brightness of hope, like the gleam of a wintry sun, passed over her face — “Perhaps Eugene himself may not desire justice under this form.”

There was a hope — a lurking hope. She remembered the beautiful Laura Faulconer. Scarcely dared she indulge that hope — but it fluttered now and then at the bottom of her heart.

Eugene was to come home the next day.

She had settled with her mother that she should not even attempt to appear. It would be an effort

which, in the present state of her health, she felt it impossible to make, even if a thousand innocent and delicate feelings had not absolutely forbade it.

Lady Emma's feelings were so complicated, that it is as difficult to describe as it was for her to unravel them. Most tender sympathy for her daughter's sufferings was brightened by a secret relief and joy that it was impossible for her to help experiencing.

To a stander by — even if that spectator be a mother — the sympathy with the sufferings of a disappointment in love bears not the slightest proportion to the intensity of the reality. Even those, who in their own young experience have gone through such pangs, forget their bitterness — the recollection pales with years. We remember that we suffered greatly, but we know that we struggled through. There is a dreamy unreality in the subject, except to those who are actually under its influence, against which we ought all — especially those of us who have outlived the years of passion — to be on our guard.

For, be the cause imaginative and unreal, or what you will, it belongs to the mysteries of the infinite. It touches upon all that is most sacred and intense of human existence. And, whatever the source may be, its power for suffering, or for bliss, is the strongest of mortal things.

To Lady Emma, as to Mr. Glenroy, the substantial part of the circumstances which involved them, pressed with what I could almost call an undue weight. That, perhaps, is not the proper expression; who can attach

undue weight to the perseverance in a great act of injustice? But this was certainly true. In comparison with the intensity of that, which pressed so strongly upon both their minds, sufficient importance was not attached to the state of Imogene's affections. They both felt that it was a severe trial of her courage, and a great sacrifice to demand; but Mr. Glenroy certainly would have preferred exacting even this, to the seeing her stripped of the possessions he so fondly loved to contemplate as hers. Lady Emma, on the other hand, would, I believe, have been satisfied, at any sacrifice, to see her child happy in her own way — but this she knew to be impossible consistently with what she considered as the demands of common honesty.

The evening of the day that Eugene returned home was fixed between Lady Emma and Mr. Elmsley as that upon which the disclosure should be made to him.

Upon Mr. Elmsley's feelings as regarded these events, it does not appear necessary to enlarge. Enough, that he felt them with all the sensibility of a most kind nature; yet, at the same time, he had only one wish and one view — that time might render it possible for justice to be done by the only way in which it could be effected.

Lady Emma had asked him to be present at the conversation with Eugene, and he had consented. He had, indeed, one very serious cause for anxiety — his doubts of the character of Eugene. There had been a wilfulness — a disposition to jealousy — a certain want of openness and generosity of temper, which had often

occasioned serious uneasiness to the conscientious tutor, even before he had looked upon the young man in the light of one to be so closely connected with his darling Imogene; but now this, which had been formerly an uneasiness, became a most restless and pressing distress.

How would Eugene bear himself under these circumstances?

The disclosure took place in Lady Emma's dressing-room; that room which Eugene had loved from a boy, as the only place in, or about Haughton, where he had ever felt perfectly happy, and his feelings unimbittered by jealousy; for here he knew himself to be truly and sincerely beloved, and here, and here alone, he occupied the first place.

"Eugene, my dear," began Lady Emma, with that soft and gentle voice which he had ever loved to hear, for when addressed to himself there was a certain tender intonation, in which he felt that even Imogene did not share — "Eugene, my dear, I have asked you to come up to my dressing-room because we shall be uninterrupted, for I have a communication of deep interest to make — one which, though we have long felt it best as regarded the happiness of all parties to keep from you, we think now must be no longer delayed. In the *we*, dearest Eugene, I include Mr. Glenroy; who, though you may at times have looked upon him as cold and harsh in his conduct to you, feels, I can truly affirm, as sincerely anxious to do you justice as my poor self. Of Mr. Elmsley I need not speak — you know by experience, how truly he has laboured

for your best interests. He is nearly as anxious to see you righted in this world as that you should find mercy in the next. — I need not say more!”

“Mamma Emma,” said Eugene, caressingly; “you are very serious, this afternoon:” — and he went up and kissed her — then, his countenance suddenly assuming an expression of deep seriousness — “I have long been expecting something of this sort.” And he placed himself upon a chair, behind the arm of the sofa upon which she was accustomed to rest, and leaning his elbow upon it, covered his face with his hand, and said: — “Go on, dear Mammy, I am ready to listen.”

She began her narration. I need not repeat the oft-told tale. He listened, without uttering a syllable. There were slight convulsive starts — faint exclamations — but he kept his face hidden with his hand.

She ended, with some solemnity, —

“I bless you, then, in your lost father’s name, as Edward Aubrey’s son.”

He lifted up his head — that fine face of his was almost divinely beautiful, as with a certain dignity he said, —

“I have expected this long.”

“You have?”

“Yes — from a child. It is difficult to hide truth — something will escape; from my earliest childhood, I have had a secret persuasion that I was more nearly connected with Haughton than was acknowledged — and that I was, in some way or other, *wronged*. That

secret persuasion has not, I fear, improved either my heart or temper."

"All has not yet been told," Mr. Elmsley now put in; "how the wrong is to be repaired? — that is the question which we all feel pressing upon us."

"Repaired! — Wrong is more easily done than repaired!" he said, with a certain haughty carelessness; "It is not probable that any reparation the friends of Imogene might think it right to offer, the son of my father would think it right to accept; slight reparations for such injuries are, to some tempers, worse than none at all — but I thank the kindness of the intention."

"You are mistaken, Aubrey."

He started from his chair at hearing the name thus bestowed upon him, and a flash of pride and pleasure kindled his cheek.

"You are mistaken, Aubrey. It is intended to offer you no slight compensation. It is felt *for* you as you feel for yourself. Nothing short of the *whole* will be tendered."

He turned pale.

"You do not mean — you cannot mean — disinherit Imogene? Oh, no — it is impossible! impossible!"

Lady Emma's cheeks were now crimsoning, as she faltered out, "Imogene cannot give it you — by the conditions of her father's will, she cannot — except — except — as ..."

"Oh!" said he, almost relieved for the moment, yet with a touch of his usual bitter sarcasm in his

voice — “Oh, yes — all right — she cannot; and so there’s an end of it — There’s not a word more to be said, except to express my gratitude for all your good intentions ... if fortunately or *unfortunately* it had not been out of your power to carry them into effect.”

“Aubrey, you are doing Lady Emma an immense injustice,” said Mr. Elmsley, with severity; then, turning to Lady Emma, “Shall I? — for you cannot proceed.”

She gave him an affirmative sign.

“Understand then, young man, that, by the conditions of the late William Aubrey’s will, it is rendered impossible for Imogene Aubrey legally to do that, which you know her well enough to be certain when once convinced of the justice of your claim, she would be ready to do — namely, surrender these possessions to the rightful heir. In one way only can this restitution be made ... The hand of the present possessor must accompany the estates.”

Again he started up, clasped his hands, and his face seemed all on fire.

Then, sinking back again —

“No — no — I cannot understand you rightly. Her hand! — did you say? — Imogene herself? Oh, no — I am not worthy.”

“You will do better justice to the human heart in future, young man” — Mr. Elmsley went on with gravity — “You will believe, whatever the knowledge of your own character may teach you — that there

are hearts to whom the rules of justice and honour are inflexible laws. There has not been the slightest approach to any desire to deal unfairly by you in these most painful circumstances. If the secret has been withheld, it was with the hope and the intention that such an attachment might spring up between you and Imogene as to render this termination of all difficulties a source of unmixed felicity to you both . . . from the existence of feelings which, if you had either of you understood your relative positions, it seemed scarcely probable, according to the usual constitution of human nature, could arise. Whether these long-cherished hopes have been, or will be, crowned with success is . . . your own secret."

"You offer to give me Imogene!" — turning to Lady Emma, his face all in a glow — "I *did* understand you rightly, then? — you offer to give me Imogene?"

"Yes, Eugene — And may Heaven bless the gift."

"You are so generous! — so just, so good! — Yet what have I ever known of you but what was generous, just, and good? Oh, I have been most ungrateful! And Glenroy too! — Does he? Can he? . . . He always seemed to hate me."

"No, no — Perhaps he did not quite understand you; you and he are so different. He sincerely wishes this, as the only possible way of redressing wrong."

"We *were*, indeed, different, and he did me but justice by his ill-opinion," Eugene said, evidently

much affected — “but this shall be the opening of a new life to me, mother — I will try to deserve her.”

“You love her then, I feared . . .”

“Love her!” — And who on earth that ever saw her but must love her! — But I tried to learn not to care for her. I believed she cared not for me. I little thought . . . But will she? — Can she?”

“It must be your part to make her will and can,” said Mr. Elmsley.

“Oh! if I could! — but I am not worthy!” then, again starting up with energy — “May Heaven leave me to perish if I do not strive to become worthy! This is a new life — a new life indeed it shall prove . . .”

“Imogene! *my* Imogene! May I see her?”

“Not just at present, Eugene; she has been very ill. These revelations have come too suddenly upon her. She requires time to look upon you in that new light in which she has allowed you to stand . . . But you must make your own way with her.”

“Ah! . . .”

We must return to Albert.

Lady Faulconer reaped, in both her children, the fruits of the deceitful and crooked ways she had adopted to reach, so far as regarded them, her several objects.

The health of her son once more gave way. He was obliged to resign for the present, at least, the

honourable post he had been invited to occupy. He went to the Madeiras instead.

Laura — the victim of Eugene's endeavours to wean himself, in resentment of her indifference, from Imogene — pined and faded. She was sincerely attached to him, and her mother had given every encouragement to the attachment — thinking by this means the more effectually to counteract Lady Emma's plans.

It was now in human nature that Eugene should hesitate for an instant when the alternative was offered to him.

He admired and honoured Imogene, and the *prestige* of her position had, with a character such as his, added a something — not, perhaps, to be called love — but a something equally strong to his other feelings. He seems like but too many young men in such circumstances, to have felt not the least scruple of honour, or the slightest remorse in respect to what had passed between himself and Laura. He chose to forget all, and found it easy enough so to do, in the absorption of his present serious interests. What was a trifling flirtation like this in comparison?

With Laura it was far different. And Lady Faulconer, with mortification, learned — what her own experience had not happened to teach her — she, never having possessed a thing of that sort to bestow — how much easier it is to encourage a girl to give her heart away than to get it back again for her when rejected.

Imogene remained a passive and patient sufferer under the force of a necessity which she felt it impossible to resist.

The idea of injuring Eugene — by persevering in retaining what she believed to be justly his — she was incapable of. She could not persist in that which, in her conscience, she believed to be a wrong. Those whom she alone trusted, had decided for her, that in one way alone was it possible for reparation to be made.

She submitted.

Patiently she bowed to the inevitable — that mysterious inevitable — in which she believed herself to read the will of a Power she was bound unresistingly to obey.

But the heart within continued like a stone; — and it is from the heart the spring of life has its source. It was as if frozen within her, — incapable of anything but passive endurance.

The only time that she was aroused to emotion, was when she by chance learned that Albert Falconer was ill, obliged to give up his situation, and go to Madeira. She trembled from head to foot — and shed a few tears — and then she stole out, and spent the whole of that evening wandering alone.

There was a sweetness in this sorrow. Something told her that they should not be parted long.

From that time she suffered mentally less, but her physical strength declined more rapidly. She observed this with a secret joy — but she endeavoured to

conceal her increasing weakness — and no one seemed fully aware of it.

It is too often thus with those we live with every day, and whom we cannot bear to believe so ill as they really are.

She had felt that the sacrifice which she thought it right to make was nothing, if it was not complete. She had, therefore, scrupulously concealed from Eugene what had passed between herself and Albert Faulconer; but further than this in concealment she would not go. She made no disguise of the sentiments with which she allowed him to aspire to her hand. Sisterly affection she had always felt; more than such regard and friendship she did not believe it would ever be in her power to offer; but that would accompany what she had to bestow, and they would try to do their duty by each other.

This was a chill to feeling upon his side; and yet there was an indescribable charm about Imogene, which, in spite of her coldness, drew him irresistibly towards her. The tenderness arising from the looking upon her as his own — that sweet human feeling became hourly more soft in its character — he began to love her worthily and well. His own disposition rapidly improved under these influences.

It was perhaps, upon the whole, fortunate that one of so arrogant and proud a temper should be humbled without being bitterly mortified. There was something about her even in her sadness and reserve that could

not mortify. Much of it he attributed to circumstances, and to her state of health.

He was sanguine, and he was honest, so far. He had resolved to endeavour to deserve her better, and his hopes told him that in time he should obtain his reward, and her love would be his at last.

The happiest time they spent together was when engaged in her great object of improving her numerous dependents. She had, at least, the satisfaction of finding that Eugene, now he considered them as virtually his own, took an ample share in these interests. He wanted her softness, her generous fulness of love; but he was sensible, and seemed to take pleasure in feeling, and acknowledging the responsibilities of his new position.

Jealousy was gone. The pride of possession, perhaps, it was, that succeeded — but better feelings were mingled with it. He began, for its own sake, to take pleasure in the good he diffused.

She seemed to find satisfaction in the progress of this change, but she continued to fade.

Her mother ventured once or twice to hint at the coming to some conclusion; an object that Eugene, to do him justice, had too much delicacy even remotely to press, for which delicacy he had his reward in her silent gratitude, and the nearest approach to tenderness of feeling that he had ever been able to excite.

She answered her mother always in the same way —

"Have patience, mother; I know what I have to do — but the right time is not come yet."

She wished Eugene to go abroad for a few months, "to pass the time away," she said; "it would be a great amusement and advantage to him."

Anything she desired he was ready to acquiesce in — more especially anything that might contribute to the perfecting of his education, for he now felt his own inferiority, and most sincerely desired to make himself more equal to her.

When Mr. Elmsley, with much satisfaction, remarked this to Imogene, she smiled gently and expressively.

She was not insensible to the pleasure of believing it —

"He will be a good master to them all, poor things!" she said.

So Eugene went for a few months abroad, and Imogene remained quietly at Haughton.

He set out in November — at the latter end of the following March it was that, to the surprise but extreme gratification of Lady Emma, she asked her to write and beg of Eugene to return home.

CHAPTER XIX.

Where'er I roam, whatever realms I see,
My heart untravell'd fondly turns to thee.

GOLDSMITH.

IN one part of the extensive gardens of Haughton Hall there was a spot which had always been an especial favourite with the successive children of the house.

It was where a small artificial lake — or, perhaps, more properly old-fashioned canal — was shut in, and enclosed by trees of every variety of form and beauty, which, hanging around it, shaded the turf and flowers in which it was set, as it were, like a precious diamond in a frame-work of jewels.

The waters of the little lake were indeed transparent as rock crystal, and in the centre a small ever-living fountain played, throwing up its plashing waters — and gurgling and breaking over some piled stones, by which it escaped, and, as a little purling brook, winded away through the neighbouring woods.

Fishes, so tame as to answer to the voice, glanced and gleamed in the clear waters, and two snow-white terns, with their crimson bills and feet, here floated and played. Wild flowers — violets, primroses, fox-gloves, forget-me-nots, honeysuckles, sweet-briers, and innumerable others — blossomed on all sides.

On one bank there stood a small old-fashioned bower, covered with creepers, which had been of late

suffered to run into a tangled maze. Imogene had thought the long festooning streamers so beautiful, that she had not suffered them to be pruned. It was at the expense of torn garments that you got in there; but she loved to have it left so.

To finish the little sketch, I must mention the abundance of lilacs, laburnums, syringas, and rhododendrons, which, growing in profusion about and around, rendered this spot at the season of the year at which we are arrived supremely beautiful.

It was the month of May, and the loveliest of days in that enchanting month of months this was — a day, when nature in all her affluence of tender beauty just bursting into life, speaks to the human heart such a tale of love and joy.

But the tale was a terrible one to her.

There are passages in human existence, when the sweetest smile of nature is like a baneful poison — stifling the heart which it cannot warm.

She had found it more than usually difficult to conceal her melancholy at this lovely season of the year.

This particular day of which I speak was one of the very loveliest. Everything is so bright. The gleaming sun shedding that heavenly glow over all things! — the many-coloured tints of the young leaves! — the rich confusion of the happy-looking flowers! — the humming insects — the floating butterflies, blue or scarlet, like winged roses or violets! — the rapture of song among the wild birds! I

use fanciful expressions, I want you to feel that heavenly day with me.

A wayfaring man, with the air of a gentleman, though very plainly clad, and bearing the aspect of one worn by severe toils, is slowly ascending the hill upon which Haughton stands.

He does not come up the usual approach; but has taken a retired bye-path, known and frequented by the family alone. This path leads through the deepest recesses of the woods and shrubberies to the house and gardens. It was here that Mrs. Birchell had found William Aubrey walking alone, years ago — when she was, as you perhaps recollect, so much affected by his appearance.

The wayfarer advances slowly, it would seem almost painfully, along — from time to time he stops, and gazes around him, or before him. Now it is some aged tree that he approaches and wistfully examines the bark, as one does to search for characters long ago inscribed there — obliterated but now; sometimes he pauses where the glades open, and the lovely landscape, and the blue distance is seen between parting trees — Now it is when the house, at some distance, is partially discovered through the branches.

The traveller stops and sighs.

Few things are more melancholy than the changes upon which life's pilgrim looks back — few things more melancholy than the return to well-known scenes when years have swept by, carrying away in their

course so much that rendered them dear, parents and children, brethren and friends.

. . . The tide of life sweeps on.
The loved, the great, the beautiful!
Where are they gone?
The very paths in which they trod,
I shall behold no more;
Each lingering vestige of their steps,
Relentless time sweeps o'er.

And what remains? A nature robbed of its life-spring — a soulless, voiceless relic of joys gone by for ever.

Such were the thoughts which saddened the brow of that travel-wearied man, now, after his long exile, returning to the hearth of his fathers, that his soul might bless it before he died.

The home of his early youth, which he had so passionately loved — with that attachment to one particular spot, which may, where it exists, be indeed called a passion, and, when in its full force, is, perhaps, one of the strongest of our nature.

He had found it impossible to obtain rest for his spirit till he should have revisited the place once more.

He must see Haughton — the Haughton of which he had been disinherited, before he could be at peace. Yet he had not murmured at his father's sentence, though its severity had, in the first vehement agony of his, as yet, unchastened feelings, driven him almost mad, and to an attempt at self-destruction. But his almost miraculous preservation — the offer, as it seemed to him, of a new life, had sobered him, and given a higher aspect to his views as respected this world and its relations.

He was changed — converted — and “the flesh came again to him, as the flesh of a little child” — Henceforward he became a new man.

The world assumed a totally different aspect.

No longer a theatre for mere personal enjoyment, but a stage for the serious and persevering discharge of duty. No longer the fleeting, painted vision of the hour, but — both as regards ourselves and others — a most grave and weighty place of preparation for a more real and permanent state of existence.

Edward Aubrey possessed a strong character. What he clearly apprehended, was not feebly embraced. Once thoroughly persuaded, and once resolved, his persuasions remained, and the resolutions built upon them faltered not.

Guided by an honest desire to acquit his conscience both to God and man, he entered upon that “path of the just.” He found it according to the promise — “Like the shining light, shining more and more unto the perfect day.”

His ardent aspirations to be of service to his fellow-creatures only strengthened as he went on. His readiness to sacrifice everything personal to this great object, increased with every effort made.

His exertions in Egypt had been often disappointed, and frustrated by the insurmountable nature of the obstacles with which he had to contend. Some good he had effected — for no sincere endeavours of this nature are, I believe, absolutely fruitless — but his soul was bleeding for the darkened Africa beyond

— Its sin and its sufferings — of which he had, where he now was, the opportunity of learning the extent and the horrors, haunted him.

Something, he felt sure, might be done, if the light of truth — of the blessed Gospel — were but honestly and faithfully carried there. He was a shipwrecked man — more fitted to undertake the dangerous and arduous service?

He confided his little boy, as we have seen, to his friends, purposing, in the course of a couple of years, to rejoin them, claim his son, and discover himself or not, as circumstances might render advisable. But this he had not been permitted to do. Various obstructions to his return, which he had found invincible, had forced him to remain buried for years in those barbarous regions. Every one had long ago supposed him to be dead — but he had lived through all, and, at length, had made his way back again to Egypt.

Here he had no difficulty in proving his identity, for he, as Omar Bey, had innumerable friends, and was universally respected and known. He gathered together what remained of his property, and returned to England, with enough to satisfy the moderate wants of a man like his present self — and to start his son in the world, if he should find him still living.

Immediately upon his landing, he made his way to Haughton. He hoped to find Mr. and Mrs. Birchell still occupying the endowment which he had managed to procure for them, and his son making one of their family; but there was an interest almost still more

tender that drew him involuntarily to the well-loved place.

He should find it occupied by his brother — the husband of his early love. It would be painful — yet it would be healing — to return to it unknown, and to wander over the dearly-loved scenes of his childhood. Whether he should disclose himself or not, he left to the inspiration of the moment.

He had put up the evening before at a small country inn, at no very great distance from Haughton, and had made inquiries of the landlord as to the state of things there.

He first asked after his brother.

“Eh, Sir!” was the answer; “you must have been a mortal long time away from this part of the country, if you do not know that William Aubrey — he as succeeded the old man on the death of his brother — has been dead himself these fourteen years and more.”

After a short pause, in which the stranger endeavoured to master and conceal the effect of this sudden shock —

“Then who lives at Haughton now? — Is it shut up?” he asked.

“Oh, no such thing, Sir; Lady Emma Aubrey — William’s widow, you know — and the daughter, Miss Aubrey, live there — and it is kept up in all its state, and has been, ever since the young man’s death.”

And then he went on to describe, in the language

of almost enthusiastic admiration, all that had been done for Armidale and the rest of the property; and spoke of Imogene as the really good, and generous — benevolent without ostentation, and religious without pretence — are usually spoken of by those who live near them. He ended his little relation by saying —

“But I’m afraid that pretty young creature is in a bad state of health. Some way or other this world does not seem good enough for such angels — they mostly die young.”

“What is the matter?”

“I don’t know — It’s no business of mine — There has been talk — Folks will talk — They say there’s been strange mysteries someway about the place. Haughton Hall has, somehow or other, not carried a blessing with it. People tell as how after all it’s a love disappointment ... Those young natures, they will feel it, Sir — it can’t be helped. I’d a child of my own once — I was hard, but I thought as how I’d good reason, Sir” — and the good landlord brushed his hands across his eyes.

“How is this?”

“Why, Sir, there’s a young man as come here with Mr. and Mrs. Birchell, late vicar of the living of Haughton, and there has been a mystery about him. Nobody knows exactly what to make of him — a very handsome young fellow he is — and now it seems he is to be married to Miss Aubrey. But people *will* talk, and they do say how it’s her mother’s doing, who was thought never to be as partial to her as

mothers are used to an only child; and they whisper that it goes rather against the grain with that dear, sweet, young girl — which seems odd, for he's a very handsome young man — but love is love, and nature is nature — and someway all's not right, I fear. But —"

Here the landlord was called away upon business. Edward lingered a little while; but, as he did not return, he went to the bar, paid his reckoning, and walked on to Haughton, where we find him wandering in the lonely woods chewing the cud of his sweet and bitter fancies.

He followed a well-known path, which led to the little nook I have described, with its small pond of gelid water, its bubbling fountain, its flowers and shrubs, and high overhanging trees. It was very sweet to him to find it so little changed. The shrubs had grown taller, and the branches of the trees had extended, and covered the little solitude with a deeper shadow; but, even to the snowy-plumaged, scarlet-billed tern, floating about upon the water, the scene was much as he had loved it in years long gone by.

The bower, too, was all tangled and overgrown, instead of being kept trim and close as it used to be; but he did not dislike it so.

He sat down upon a bench near the entrance of this bower, and gazed upon the water, and the trees, and the lovely clear blue sky, and mused upon past days, and thought of the brother he had loved so dearly, and who had betrayed him, and yet whom he

had loved on still — But now he was dead, and on this earth he should behold his face no more.

He had longed to see William, to have all explained, and, if his brother had yielded to temptation, to pity him and be reconciled. He also longed to see Emma once again, even as his brother's wife; for his own marriage, and all that he had since gone through, had sobered his feelings, and what once had been passion was now only a kindly friendship. Then he thought of the landlord's tale — of his own beautiful boy — the legacy of that lovely being he had for a short time called his own; and, above all, he thought with interest of that child of William and Emma, whom the landlord had painted with so much honest enthusiasm, and of the half-explained story of her decline.

He too well knew the romances which the gossips of a neighbourhood are apt to spin out, grounded upon events taking place in a leading family, to attach much importance to the landlord's story; but he set to considering how he should, if possible, get acquainted with the truth of the matter, before making himself known.

He had thus remained for pretty nearly an hour, engaged in such thoughts, when he heard voices approaching. They seemed to proceed from the walk which led to the house, and there was a sound as of wheels.

Unwilling to be seen till he had finally resolved upon what plan to pursue, he retreated into the bower

close by, from whence, though effectually hidden himself by the obscurity of the place, and the tangled branches which hung over the entrance, he could not help seeing, and hearing also, as he afterwards found, what passed by the side of the water.

He had no intention of this sort when he had withdrawn within the bower to escape notice; and he was now a prisoner, for, unless he discovered himself at once, there was no means of escape.

The noise of wheels proceeded, not from a garden chair, but from a sort of couch, that was drawn by a footman in livery. By it walked an elderly woman, who seemed an upper servant also. Upon the couch, her head resting upon some raised pillows, so that she was only in a half-recumbent posture, lay a young, beautiful, but pale and most delicate-looking girl; with an expression of face that at once riveted his interest.

A divine sweetness and patience was expressed in it; but there was something more than that — a sort of celestial brightness — a sublimity — such as beams from the countenances of the glorious angels, “who excel in strength.”

It was indeed a lovely apparition.

A revelation, it seemed, of better existences than those of this poor world.

A voice most soft and sweet, yet clear and harmonious, worthy of the divine countenance, was heard to speak: —

“Thank you — and now, if you please, put down the writing-things there,” as a second footman approached, carrying a little table, that fitted to the sofa; “have you my writing-book, and the packet of

papers? — There, if you please. Nurse, dear, I would rather be quite alone; but don't look unhappy, dear Nursy — I will let you come again in half-an-hour — just to see that I am safe."

And she smiled gently and affectionately, and then she coughed — and Nurse turned away her head.

The footmen were already gone.

"I wish, Miss Aubrey, you would have done with that nasty writing," began Nurse, lingering, as if unwilling to leave her; "it's worse for your chest than anything."

"I don't do much in the writing way, Nursy, dear; don't be unreasonable, that's a good woman! — A little I *must* do" — cough again — "I have a good deal to finish — before the — the end of May."

"Ah! the end of May will soon be here — but I fear me you don't mean to be better then."

A faint colour flew to the pale cheek.

"I mean to be better, if I can."

"Do you, really? — Are you sure — sure — you don't want — you don't wish to be *worse*? — I am but a poor servant, Miss Aubrey" — Imogene cast her eyes upon her with such a loving look! — "but I'm your nurse all one — and I've taken you from the first, and loved you as my own — I don't like to vex you, for you have had more than enough to vex you — I can't help seeing that . . . It was upon my heart to speak to you hundreds of times, but I've been so afraid to worry you — but now it's borne in upon my mind, there is a meaning about that end of May — *Those who do not wish to get better, seldom or never get better.*"

"Do you think so? — I am sure I do not know."

"There's something within me tells me, *you* do not want to get better."

A deep, serious expression in the lovely eyes, which were fixed upon Nurse in silence.

But presently she said, "Nurse, dear, you were right before — I would rather, if you please, not talk of these things."

"Ah, dear me! — And perhaps it may be the *not* talking of 'em which makes 'em press so heavy."

Again the sad and serious eyes were lifted up to Nurse's face, with a sort of doubtful acquiescence.

"Most young ladies of your age, dear, have sisters, or been to school and have schoolfellows — friends next to sisters — and such get together, and talk these things over — and comfort and help each other's young hearts, in a way old cum-fogies as I am can't do. But it's my belief — even if *I* might speak a word now and then — just a-trying to soften the sore a little — it would be better than the making a grave of your poor heart, and burying all there in silence. Now, if I might only say — Albert!"

She started, half raised herself, coloured crimson — but only said: —

"Oh! Nurse! — How dare you?"

"I'd dare more than that, and I could do you any good," said Nurse, steadily.

Then she went on, for Imogene had relapsed into silence.

"Eugene's a handsome boy, and a clever boy; and many a lady in this land there is — and one I think I know of — would be proud and blest to call him her own — but he's not *your* boy, and never

was — and one may as well try to heave up the Tower of London, as to cross nature in these things.”

“Nurse! you must not — You must not talk in this way!”

“But I must! It’s out at last. You’re killing yourself, Imogene, I see it — by inches — nay, by yards; for death comes on with rapid strides. You strive to please your mamma — but you can’t do it.”

“I tell you you *can-not* do it — and you must give in at last. Nature’s too strong, and you must give in, or it will kill you.”

The colour had faded away as fast almost as it had risen, at the sound of the too-dearly loved name; it now returned faintly again, as with a gentle patient smile, she said, —

“Life was once very dear to me — Life is a sweet warm thing — Death! — oh! death is awful at times — not always,” and she lifted up her eyes to the heavens above her. “No — no — not always — always. And, awful or not, when we are summoned we must go — willingly or unwillingly, we must go. Oh! may I be ready when I am called.”

“But you are not called. Killing one’s self is not being called — and you *are* killing yourself — I tell you, you *can-not* do it!”

“I must do it, Nurse — you talk of what you do not understand. We must do our duty, and this I know to be *my* duty. And so may He who gave me this task help me — as I will strive to do that which I believe is right.”

“But only listen.”

“No, Nurse. I have listened already too long! You mean it kindly, Nurse, dear,” she went on

caressingly, seeing Nurse look pained and hurt — “I know how kindly you mean it; but it is mistaken kindness — You cannot alter facts — you do not know all that I know. What I do — believe and trust me, it is my duty to do. I have settled to perform it in the way least painful to myself. If I am selfish in this, I hope to be forgiven — for I have not strength for more. Don’t, dear Nursey, speak to me upon this subject again — You only weaken me, when you mean the best, and I want all the strength I can get. And now, Nursey dear, leave me a little, I wish to be by myself.”

The tears were now running down the good woman’s cheeks. Imogene looked agitated.

“Don’t, don’t, dear Nursey — For my sake, don’t. Go away, dear Nursey, now — I must be a little while quite alone.”

“I am afeard to leave you.”

“Don’t be afraid, dear good Nursey,” affectionately, “I am not quite so bad as that comes to — I am not going to faint away — I shall lie quietly at my work, for I have a good deal to do, but I will not tire myself” — as nurse shook her head — “and in half-an-hour by your watch I give you leave just to come and peep, to see how I am going on — but, if all’s right, go away again, without interrupting me by speaking.”

Nurse shook up the pillows of the couch — adjusted the eider-down quilt that covered the young girl’s feet, arranged the light gray silk sort of open pelisse that she wore over her white muslin dress, and quitted her.

She lay quite still for some time after being left

alone, half raised, and resting upon her arm — her eyes, with an air of loving peacefulness, wandering slowly over the clear blue sky, the shrubberies, in all their wealth of lilacs and laburnums, and the fountain and its crystal basin of waters. Then her face gradually clouded over, her eyes moistened, she sighed, and wistfully murmured in a low voice:

“We might have been so happy.”

Then, as if determined to resist the indulgence of regretful thoughts, she rose from her couch and walked slowly round the little basin, examining the flowers and shrubs, and breaking off large bunches of the lilac — white and purple grape clusters, with streamers of yellow laburnums, she returned to her sofa.

Her steps were faltering and uncertain. She was evidently extremely weak; and when she replaced herself upon the couch, she drew her breath with difficulty.

When she was a little recovered, she opened the portfolio beside her, and first she drew forth a tiny manuscript book — It seemed to be a book of prayers, for she read in it, and appeared absorbed in an act of devotion. As she proceeded, her sweet and troubled countenance gradually assumed an air of divine serenity — and a something like a pale lambent glory of hope and peace was diffused over it. She pressed the little book to her lips as she concluded, closed it, and placed it under the cushion beneath her head. Then she took up the bunches of flowers which lay by her side — buried her face among them, as if drinking in their fragrance with rapture — replaced them — once more opened her portfolio, took out a number of plans and calculations, and, with her pencil

in her hand, was soon occupied reading, comparing, and making notes.

Nurse stole to the appointed spot — but seeing her thus occupied, retired without giving the least sign of her presence, and the young girl quietly continued her work.

Not a sound disturbed the stillness of the place; except that of the little birds hopping and creeping about, as if no human being were present; the bees humming among the flowers; a throstle singing his musical heart out, at a little distance; and, now and then, a cuckoo calling in the woods.

Never was a lovelier scene.

And so he thought, as with a saddening brow he gazed upon it, and, slight as the indications had been, thought that he but too well understood the story.

He perceived that the plan with which Imogene was busied, was one for building a church.

She had been thus lying for about an hour, when footsteps were again heard approaching, and a gentleman appeared. He came up to the side of the couch.

“Mr. Elmsley,” she said, “Oh, I wanted you to come.”

“I have been up to Armidale — or I should have been with you sooner.”

“I have been looking it over — and I think it will do — I have noticed a few little things I should like to have altered — When will they be able to begin?”

“Not until the end of June, I fear.”

“Ah! — But, if anything should happen — I mean, you know, life is uncertain to us all — if anything

should — though it were not begun — *he* would begin it — would he not — For my sake — don't you think he would?"

The pale countenance of Mr. Elmsley was contracted with an expression of excessive pain, as he said, —

"You will live not only to see it begun — but completed — I trust in Heaven's mercy that you will — and many, many years, please God, to see the fruits of this good work."

"When all is settled and over, you will be better," after a little pause he continued — "This restlessness and agitation keeps you in such a feeble state — It is a duty to be performed — and when it *is* performed, and not till then, will you taste the peace that waits upon honourable and conscientious self-sacrifice."

She made no reply to this — but kept her eyes fixed upon a drawing of the elevation of a church. She pointed to one of the windows — "I don't know that I quite like this," she said.

After that she continued to converse upon that and other subjects connected with Armidale. At last she said, she felt inclined to walk a little way among the trees, and asked Mr. Elmsley to give her his arm.

In assisting her from her couch he threw down the cushion — the little manuscript book fell with it to the ground, unperceived.

They walked about a quarter of an hour, then she returned to her couch, and, complaining that she was tired, asked Mr. Elmsley to summon the footman to draw her back to the house — which was done.

The couch slowly disappeared among the trees — The little book was left where it had fallen.

He never thought whether it was a violation of good faith or not — he stepped from his concealment, seized the book, and returned within the bower to look into it.

He found it what he had expected — a manual of her own meditations and prayers — and the whole story of her heart was revealed!

I am not going to give you any extracts.

Such things are too solemn, too real — touch too nearly upon the *only real* — to be admissible here.

From what you already know of that heart you will imagine what its silent givings forth must have been.

He read with moistened eyes.

The last melancholy prayer was one that had evidently been very recently composed. It was a supplication for forgiveness if she did wrong in delaying the consummation of her sacrifice until the hour of approaching death was near. It was evident, by the whole tenor of the prayer, and one or two short ejaculations and meditations that accompanied it, that she believed that hour was now drawing near, and that she had thought it right to summon Eugene home, that their hands might be united before it was too late.

A fervent entreaty for forgiveness in that, even now, she could not banish that other image entirely from her heart — and a supplication that they might meet in peace in heaven — ended the writing; the book was not finished — there were a few blank pages left.

He now felt that he understood everything.

Except that he could not quite enter into the in-

dispensable nature, as the young creature seemed to consider it, of the duty to be performed. He saw that he himself was looked upon as one who had been greatly wronged, and his son through him — but to be disinherited was, after all, not such an unheard-of event in human life as to demand for its compensation a sacrifice enormous as this.

But, without questioning further as to this matter, upon one thing he at once decided — the sacrifice should not be made.

Haughton was dear — No one but himself knew how dear. It was within his grasp — but he turned at once away from the temptation.

He was a man of prompt resolution — What it was right to do, was, without parley, to be done.

My tale must be brought to a close.

Edward Aubrey has returned to the house of his fathers, and "Peace and Righteousness have kissed each other."

He was wise, experienced, and good.

He did not object in this tangled intricacy of interests, powers, to endeavour at a compromise between different wishes and claims.

There was no romantic exaggeration about his character.

Rather than sacrifice that sweet young creature — perish Haughton and everything on earth he held dear! But he did not refuse to seek for some arrangement, some middle term, by which the rights of all might be adjusted.

We never know until an able, energetic, deter-

mined spirit takes a matter up, what is or is not, possible in human affairs.

He set himself at once to examine the stringency of those dispositions in her father's will by which Imogene appeared to be bound.

In law papers — it is a sort of proverb I have heard — “He who binds can loose.” It has been found so in the case of still more considerable interests than even those in question here.

The method was tried, and it was found possible to release Imogene.

From the first hour that the hope was suggested, she began to rally; as that hope brightened, to mend; when the hope was realized, she was saved.

Edward refused to listen to the tale of “Alice Craven's Romance,” as he persisted in calling it. He chose to continue to regard William as his own twin brother, and Imogene as his rightful heiress; and he insisted upon an equal division of the property being made between the two children, as the only terms upon which he would accept the least portion of it.

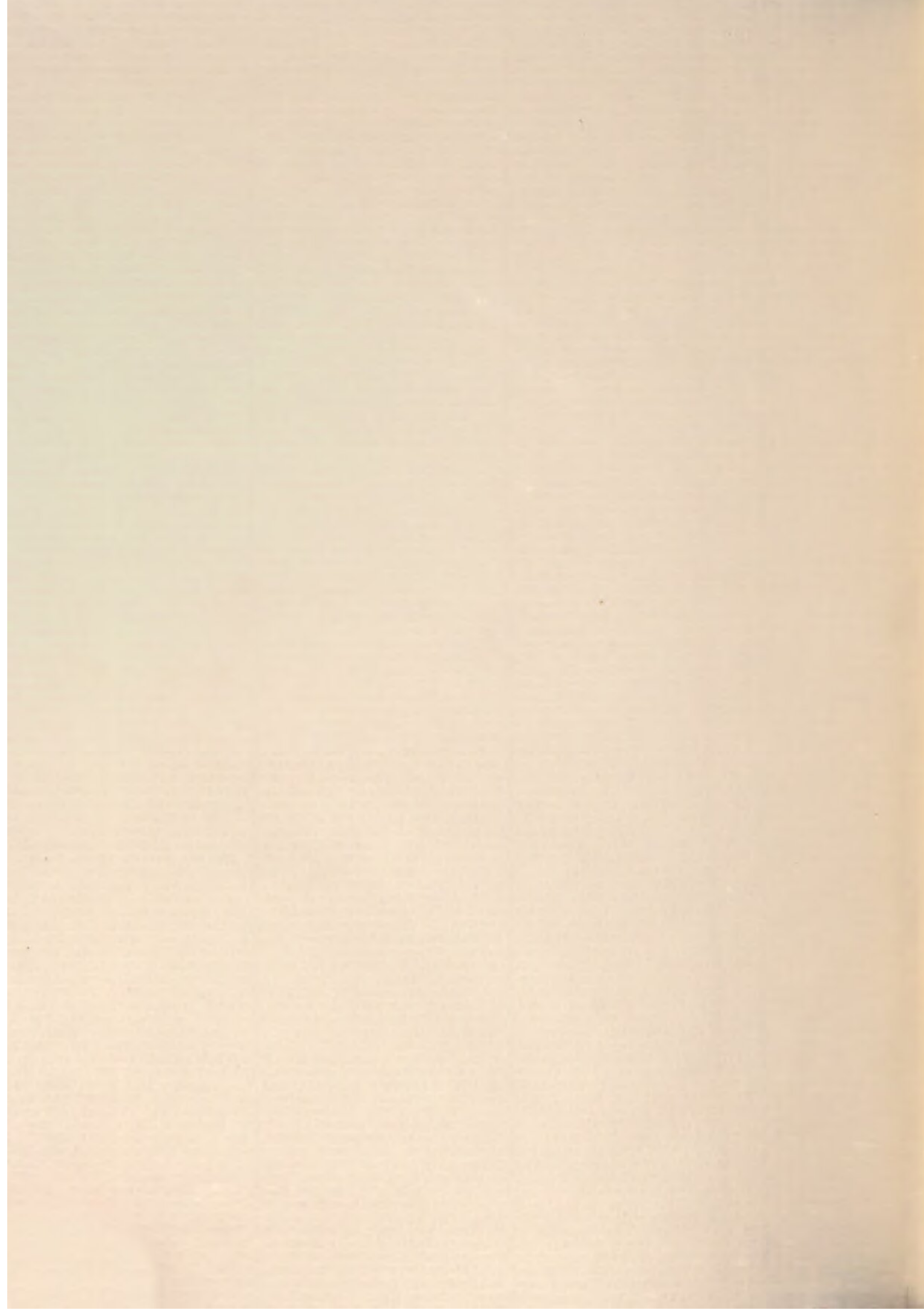
So Imogene and Eugene held Armidale, which it was not easy to divide between them in equal partnership. Edward had Haughton, and Imogene left it without regret. She had suffered too much to have any difficulty in giving it up. She loved Drystoke a thousand times better.

Imogene married Albert, and Eugene married Laura.

And I am afraid this is, after all, a very immoral story, for Lady Faulconer's schemes met with a success which she very little deserved.

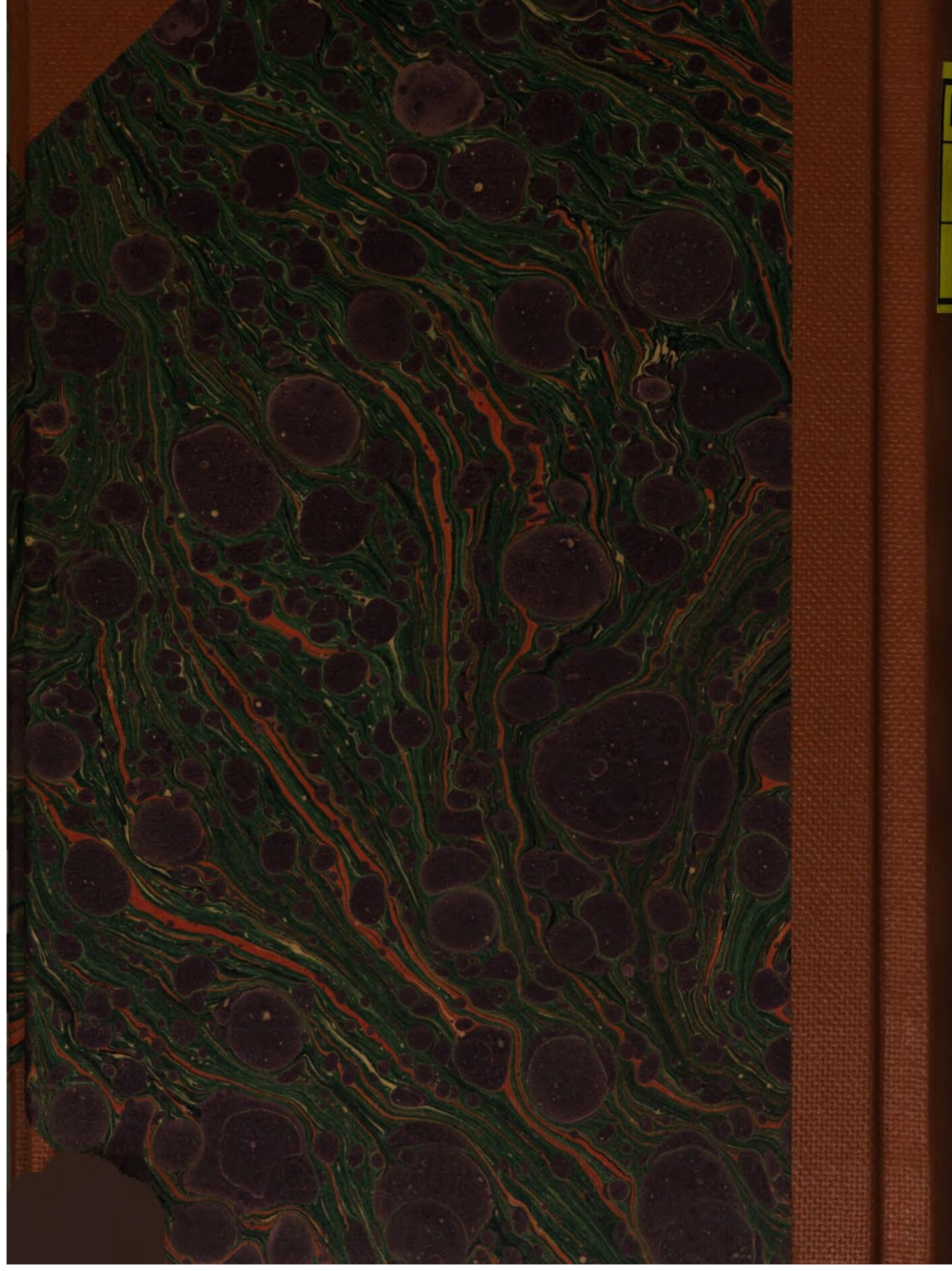
THE END.

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